# AGENDA

Board of Wildlife Resources
Wildlife and Boat Committee
7870 Villa Park Drive
Henrico, Virginia 23228

May 21, 2025
9:00 am

Committee Members: Mr. James Edmunds, Chair, Mr. Woody Woodall, Ms. Laura Walters, Mr. Will Wampler (Alternate), Mr. Brian Vincent (Alternate)

DWR Staff Liaisons: Mr. Michael Lipford, Dr. Mike Bednarski, Ms. Stacey Brown, and Ms. Amy Martin

1. Call to Order and Welcome
   Mr. Edmunds

2. Approval of the March 19, 2025, Committee Meeting Minutes ***Final Action***
   Mr. Edmunds

3. Public Comment – Non - Agenda Item
   Mr. Edmunds

4. Wildlife Regulation Amendments -Staff Final Recommendations ***Final Action***
   Mr. Cale Godfrey

5. Boating and Administrative Regulation Amendments – Staff Final Recommendations
   Ms. Stacey Brown ***Final Action***

6. Turkey Management Plan ***Final Action***
   Mr. Mike Dye

7. Wildlife Health Update
   Dr. John Tracey

8. Director's Report
   Mr. Ryan Brown

9. Chair's Report
   Mr. Edmunds

10. Next Meeting Date: Wednesday, August 20, 2025
    Mr. Edmunds

11. Additional Business/Comments
    Mr. Edmunds

12. Adjournment
    Mr. Edmunds

Draft Meeting Minutes

Wildlife and Boat Committee
Board of Wildlife Resources
7870 Villa Park Drive – Board Room
Henrico, VA 23228

March 19, 2025
9:00 am

**Present:** Mr. James Edmunds, **Chair**, Ms. Laura Walters, Mr. Will Wampler (alternate), **Absent**: Mr. Woody Woodall, Mr. Brian Vincent; **Board Members** in attendance: Mr. Jon Cooper, Mr. Lynwood Broaddus, and Mr. Michael Formica, Mr. John Daniel, Mr. George Terwilliger, Dr. Mamie Parker; **Executive Director:** Mr. Ryan Brown; **Deputy Directors:** Ms. Becky Gwynn and Mr. Darin Moore; **Director's Working Group:** Dr. Mike Bednarski, Ms. Stacey Brown, Mr. George Braxton, Mr. Michael Lipford, Ms. Shelby Crouch, Mr. Bob Smet, Mr. Paul Kugelman

The Committee Chair called the meeting to order at 9:00 am and welcomed everyone. The Chair noted for the record that a Quorum was present for today's meeting.

**Approval of the January 22, 2025, Committee Meeting Minutes:**

The Chair called for a motion to approve the January 22, 2025, Wildlife and Boating minutes. Ms. Walters made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 22, 2025, committee meeting. Mr. Wampler seconded the motion. Ayes: Edmunds, Walters, Wampler

**Public Comment - Non-Agenda Item:** The Chair called for Public Comment – Non-Agenda Items.

- Mr. Kirby Burch spoke regarding the Hound Hunting Committee and Deer and Bear season

**Proposals regarding Migratory Game Birds Seasons and Bag Limits:** The Chair called on Mr. Ben Lewis for a presentation.

Mr. Ben Lewis gave a presentation on the Proposals regarding Migratory Game Birds Seasons and Bag Limits.

After comments and questions, The Chair thanked Mr. Lewis for his presentation.

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Edmunds made a motion, I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee of Wildlife Resources advance the 2025-2026 Migratory Game Bird Season and Bag

Limit recommendations to the Board as presented by staff. It was seconded by Ms. Walters. Ayes: Edmunds, Walters, Wampler

**Wildlife Regulations Amendments – Staff Recommendations:** Mr. Edmunds called on Mr. Cale Godfrey for a presentation.

Mr. Godfrey gave a presentation on the 2025-26 Wildlife Regulation Amendments – Staff Recommendations.

After comments and questions, The Chair thanked Mr. Godfrey for his presentation.

Speakers:

Deer and Elk Regulations:

4VAC15-90-10, 4VAC15-90-70, 4VAC15-90-80, 4VAC15-90-89. 4VAC15-90-91

4VAC15-90-530, 4VAC15-90-540, 4VAC15-90-550

- Mr. Gary Kimberlin spoke regarding Deer

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Wampler made a motion, I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee recommend to the Board of Wildlife Resources proposing for public comment the amendments to the deer and elk regulations as presented by staff but modified to include Mr. Edmunds' amendment to 4VAC15-90-91that Halifax County provide full season either-sex hunting opportunities during the firearms deer season. It was seconded by Ms. Walters.

Bear Regulations:

4VAC15-50-11, 4VAC15-50-70, 4VAC15-50-71, 4VAC15-50-120

- Greg Austin spoke regarding Bear
- Mr. Gary Kimberlin spoke regarding Bear
- Mr. Steve Nicely spoke regarding Bear
- Mr. Lee McLaughlin spoke regarding Bear
- Mr. Eric Lehmann spoke regarding Bear

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Wampler made a motion, I move that the Wildlife & Boat Committee recommend to the Board of Wildlife Resources proposing for public comment the amendments to the bear regulations as presented by staff but modified to include 1) Mr. Edmunds' amendment to 4VAC15-50-11adding an additional week to the beginning of the firearms bear hunting season in Charlotte, Halifax, Mecklenburg, and Prince Edward counties; 2) Mr. Terwilliger's amendment to 4VAC15-50-120 that bear hound chase season not be expanded into new areas or new dates beyond what is currently provided during the bear hound training and firearms bear seasons; and 3) Mr. Wampler's amendment to 4VAC15-50-11 to add the 3-day early firearms season and additional week to the beginning of the firearms bear hunting season in

Montgomery, Pulaski, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe counties. It was seconded by Ms. Walters. Ayes: Edmunds, Walters, Wampler

General Regulations:

4VAC15-20-50, 4VAC15-20-65, 4VAC15-20-130, 4VAC15-20-155, 4VAC15-30.40, 4VAC15-40-282, 4VAC15-403-10, 4VAC15-320-25

- NO SPEAKERS

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Wampler made a motion, I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee recommend to the Board of Wildlife Resources proposing for public comment the amendments to the general regulations as present by staff. It was seconded by Ms. Walters. Ayes: Edmunds, Walters, Wampler

Furbearer & Waterfowl Blinds:

4VAC15-160-31, 4VAC15-210-51, 4VAC15-170-30, 4VAC15-260-50

- NO SPEAKERS

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Edmunds made a motion, I move that the Wildlife & Boat Committee recommend to the Board of Wildlife Resources proposing for public comment the amendments to the furbearer and waterfowl blind regulations as presented by staff. It was seconded by Ms. Walters and Mr. Wampler. Ayes: Edmunds, Walters, Wampler

Firearms Regulations:

4VAC15-40-60, 4VAC15-40-61 (NEW), 4VAC15-40-62 (NEW), 4VAC15-40-70, 4VAC15-210-10, 4VAC15-70-60, 4VAC15-240-60

- Gary Kimberlin spoke regrading Firearm Regulations

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Wampler made a motion, I move that the Wildlife & Boat Committee recommend to the Board of Wildlife Resources proposing for public comment the amendments to the firearms regulations as presented by staff but to include Mr. Terwilliger's amendment to 4VAC15-40-62 that staff modify the recommended language to more fully address the discharge of firearms on department-owned and managed lands beyond the established boundaries of the shooting ranges. It was seconded by Ms. Walters. Ayes: Edmunds, Walters, Wampler

**Boating and Administrative Regulation Amendments – Staff Recommendations:** Mr. Edmunds called on Ms. Stacey Brown for a presentation.

Ms. Brown presented the Boating and Administrative Regulation Amendments – Staff Recommendations.

After questions and comments, the Chair thanked Ms. Brown for her presentation.

The Chair called for a motion, Ms. Walters made a motion, I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee approve the staff recommendations for Regulations related to Boating and Administration be released for public comment. It was seconded by Mr. Wampler. Ayes: Edmunds, Walters, Wampler

**Biennial Review of Approved Sanctioning Organizations for Foxhound Field Trials:**

Mr. Edmunds called on Mr. Paul Kugelman for a presentation.

Mr. Kugelman presented the Biennial Review of Approved Sanctioning Organization for Foxhound Field Trails.

The Chair thanked Mr. Kugelman for his presentation.

Speakers:

1. Gary Kimberlin spoke regarding who is VOFTA
2. Amanda Savignano spoke regarding who governs VOFTA

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Wampler presented a motion, I move that the committee recommend to the board to accept the biennial review of sanctioning organizations for Foxhound Field Trial Permits (Outside of Foxhound Training Preserves) as presented by staff. It was seconded by Ms. Walters, Ayes: Edmunds, Walters, Wampler

In the essence of time and other Committee meetings scheduled, the Chair of the Wildlife and Boat Committee Adjourned the remainder of the agenda at 12:50 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Frances Boswell
/s/

# VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

## BOARD OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES REGULATION AMENDMENT PROPOSALS

***Staff Final Recommendations***

**May 2025**

**Wildlife Regulation Proposals – Staff Final Recommendation Summary**

**Deer & Elk Regulations**

| | |
|---|---|
| 4VAC15-90-10 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-90-70 | ***Recommended as proposed, WITH MODIFICATION*** |
| 4VAC15-90-80 | ***Recommended as proposed, WITH MODIFICATION*** |
| 4VAC15-90-89 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-90-91 | ***Recommended as proposed, WITH MODIFICATION*** |
| 4VAC15-90-530 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-90-540 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-90-550 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |

**Bear Regulations**

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|---|---|
| 4VAC15-50-11 | ***Recommended as proposed, WITH MODIFICATION*** |
| 4VAC15-50-70 | ***Recommended as proposed, WITH MODIFICATION*** |
| 4VAC15-50-71 | ***Recommended as proposed, WITH MODIFICATION*** |
| 4VAC15-50-120 | ***Recommended as proposed, WITH MODIFICATION*** |

**General Regulations**

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|---|---|
| 4VAC15-20-50 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-20-65 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-20-130 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-20-155 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-30-40 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-40-282 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-40-310 | ***Recommended as proposed, WITH MODIFICATION*** |

**Furbearer & Waterfowl Blind Regulations**

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|---|---|
| 4VAC15-160-31 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-210-51 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-170-30 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-260-50 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |

**Firearms Regulations**

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|---|---|
| 4VAC15-40-60 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-40-61 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-40-62 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-40-70 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-210-10 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-70-60 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |
| 4VAC15-240-60 | ***Recommended as proposed*** |

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# Deer & Elk Regulations

**4VAC15-90-10**

**Game: Deer: Open season; generally.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) establish a 4-week general firearms deer season on private lands in all or portions of 20 counties west of the Blue Ridge Mountains; (ii) establish a 7-week firearms season on private lands in western Amherst, Bedford, Carroll, Floyd, Franklin, Montgomery, western Nelson, Page, Pulaski, Roanoke, Rockingham (east of routes 613 and 731), Shenandoah, Warren, and Wythe counties; (iii) implement early and late antlerless only firearms seasons in the counties of Greene, Hanover, Henrico, and James City; and (iv) make descriptions for public and private land seasons in Carroll and Roanoke counties consistent with other counties.

**Proposed language of the amendment:**

**4VAC15-90-10. Open season; generally.**

A. It shall be lawful to hunt deer in the following localities, including the cities and towns therein, during the following seasons, all dates inclusive.

| Locality | Season |
|---|---|
| Accomack County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Albemarle County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Alleghany County (except on national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Alleghany County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Amelia County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| ~~Amherst County (west of Business U.S. 29 from the James River to its intersection with U.S. 29 just south of the Town of Amherst continuing north on U.S. 29 to the Tye River, except on national forest lands)~~ | ~~Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following~~ |

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| Amherst County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Amherst County (~~east of Business U.S. 29, as defined above~~ except on national forest) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Appomattox County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Arlington County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Arlington County (antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Augusta County (except on national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Augusta County (national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Bath County (except on national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Bath County (national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Bedford County (except on national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November ~~and for 28 consecutive days following~~ through the first Saturday in January |

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| Bedford County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Bedford County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through January 31 |
| Bland County (except on national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Bland County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Botetourt County (except on national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Botetourt County (national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Brunswick County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Buchanan County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for ~~14~~ 28 consecutive days following |
| Buckingham County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Campbell County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Caroline County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |

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| Carroll County (~~private lands~~ except on national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November ~~and for 28 consecutive days following~~ through the first Saturday in January |
| Carroll County (~~public lands~~ national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Carroll County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Charles City County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Charlotte County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Chesapeake (City of) | October 1 through November 30 |
| Chesterfield County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Clarke County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Clarke County (antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Craig County (except on national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |

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| Craig County (national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Culpeper County (except Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Culpeper County (Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Culpeper County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Cumberland County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Dickenson County (except on federal lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Dickenson County (federal lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Dinwiddie County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Essex County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Fairfax County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |

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| Fairfax County (antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Fauquier County (except Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Fauquier County (Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Fauquier County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Floyd County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November ~~and for 28 consecutive days following~~ through the first Saturday in January |
| Floyd County (antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Fluvanna County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Franklin County (federal and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |

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| Franklin County (except on federal and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Frederick County (non-national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Frederick County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Frederick County (non-national-forest lands antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Giles County (except on national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Giles County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Gloucester County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Goochland County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Grayson County (except on national forest lands and Grayson Highlands State Park) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Grayson County (national forest lands and Grayson Highlands State Park) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Greene County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |

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| Greene County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Greensville County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Halifax County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Hanover County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Hanover County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Henrico County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Henrico County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Henry County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Highland County (except on national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Highland County (national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |

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| Isle of Wight County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| James City County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| James City County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| King and Queen County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| King George County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| King William County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Lancaster County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Lee County (except on national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Lee County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Loudoun County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Loudoun County (antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the |

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| | first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Louisa County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Lunenburg County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Madison County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Madison County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Mathews County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Mecklenburg County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Middlesex County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Montgomery County (non-national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November ~~and for 28 consecutive days following~~ through the first Saturday in January |
| Montgomery County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |

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| Montgomery County (non-national forest lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| ~~Nelson County (west of Route 151, except on national forest lands)~~ | ~~Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following~~ |
| Nelson County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Nelson County (~~east of Route 151~~ except on national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| New Kent County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Northampton County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Northumberland County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Nottoway County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Orange County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Orange County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the |

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| | first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Page County (except on national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Page County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Page County (non-national forest lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Patrick County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Pittsylvania County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Powhatan County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Prince Edward County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Prince George County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Prince William County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Prince William County (antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the |

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| | first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Pulaski County (except on New River Unit of the Radford Army Ammunition Plant adjacent to the Town of Dublin and national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November ~~and for 28 consecutive days following~~ through the first Saturday in January |
| Pulaski County (New River Unit of the Radford Army Ammunition Plant adjacent to the Town of Dublin) | Saturday prior to the second Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Pulaski County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Pulaski County (non-national forest lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Rappahannock County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Rappahannock County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Richmond County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Roanoke County (~~private lands~~ except on national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November ~~and for 28 consecutive days following~~ through the first Saturday in January |
| Roanoke County (~~public lands~~ national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |

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| Rockbridge County (except on national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Rockbridge County (national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Rockingham County (except on national forest lands and private lands west of routes 613 and 731) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Rockingham County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Rockingham County (private lands west of routes 613 and 731) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Russell County (except on national forest lands, Channels State Forest, and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Russell County (national forest lands, Channels State Forest, and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Scott County (except on national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Scott County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Shenandoah County (except on national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Shenandoah County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Shenandoah County (non-national forest lands antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in |

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| | October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Smyth County (except on national forest lands, Hungry Mother State Park, and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Smyth County (national forest lands, Hungry Mother State Park, and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Southampton County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Spotsylvania County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Stafford County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Suffolk (City of)<br>(east of Dismal Swamp Line) | October 1 through November 30 |
| Suffolk (City of)<br>(west of Dismal Swamp Line) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Surry County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Sussex County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Tazewell County (except on national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Tazewell County (national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |

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| Virginia Beach (City of) | October 1 through November 30 |
| Warren County (non-national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Warren (non-national forest lands antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |
| Warren County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Washington County (except on national forest lands, Channels State Forest, and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Washington County (national forest lands, Channels State Forest, and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Westmoreland County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Wise County (except on national forest) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 28 consecutive days following |
| Wise County (national forest lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |
| Wythe County (except on national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| Wythe County (national forest and department-owned lands) | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 consecutive days following |

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|---|---|
| York County | Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January |
| York County (private lands and antlerless deer only) | First Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March |

B. Except as provided in subsection A of this section, deer may be hunted from the Saturday prior to the third Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive, within the incorporated limits of any city or town that allows deer hunting.

C. In addition to provisions of subsection A of this section, antlerless deer may be taken from the first Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October and the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March, both dates inclusive, within any disease focus zone designated by the department.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

(i) Many constituents west of the Blue Ridge Mountains (WBR), especially in southwestern Virginia, provided comments during the most recent scoping period requesting a longer deer firearms season due to limited time to hunt during the current 2-week season. Recent (2024) hunter survey results showed equal support for 2-, 3-, and 4-week rifle seasons WBR. During recent regulation cycles, several counties WBR had general firearms seasons extended to four weeks (with full season either-sex and earn a buck) to help meet population objectives and/or manage chronic wasting disease (CWD). Providing two additional weeks of general firearms deer hunting offers expanded hunting opportunities for all counties WBR, while addressing population objectives where needed through expanded either-sex opportunity. Where population reduction is not necessary WBR, either-sex days can still be limited. Under this proposal, public lands WBR (i.e., National Forests and Department-owned lands) will retain 2-week general firearms deer seasons in light of concerns about lower deer population levels and to reduce potential conflicts with bear hunters who have traditionally hunted on these lands at that time.

(ii) Despite having full season either-sex, earn a buck, and early and late antlerless only firearms seasons, Page, Shenandoah, and Warren counties continue to have deer populations above objective with increasing population trends in chronic wasting disease (CWD) disease management areas (DMAs). Increasing the current 2-week firearms seasons to 7-week seasons will increase opportunity to reduce deer abundance and make the season lengths here consistent with those in adjacent counties in DMA1 and DMA2.

Similarly, deer populations in DMA3 continue to be above objective despite full season either-sex, earn a buck, early and late antlerless only firearms seasons, and increasing season length to 4 weeks during recent regulations cycles. Increasing firearms season length to 7 weeks in Carroll, Floyd, Franklin, Montgomery, Pulaski, Roanoke, and Wythe will increase opportunity to reduce deer abundance and make season lengths consistent with DMA1 and DMA2 where CWD has also become established.

The private land deer population index in Bedford County continues to greatly exceed the population objective in the Department's deer management plan, despite having full-season, either-sex deer hunting seasons and the earn a buck requirement for many years. Bedford is in the top 10 for highest deer-vehicle collisions in the state, annually. While Bedford yields the highest deer kill per square mile in the state each year, deer-human conflicts continue to increase. Given the popularity of deer hunting in the county, increasing the firearms season length to 7 weeks may be impactful toward reaching the deer population objective.

Firearms season lengths for Amherst and Nelson counties are split by routes 29 and 151, respectively, with the west sides having a 4-week firearms season and the east sides having a 7-week season. Population indices for these counties have been above objective for years. Increasing the west sides of the counties will increase harvest opportunity to help meet objectives and simplify regulations for hunters and officers within the county.

Rockingham County continues to present a unique deer management challenge, with the majority of the county offering high quality deer habitat, abundant agriculture, urban/exurban development, and high deer abundance with associated human-deer conflicts. Objectives here have been to reduce deer abundance, yet population trends continue to increase. However, in the far western portion of the county (west of Routes 613 and 731), deer habitat is much poorer, there is little agriculture, deer abundance is lower, and either-sex hunting opportunity has been more conservative. Private lands in western Rockingham will receive the 4-week firearms season, with limited antlerless days, to be consistent with all other counties WBR; however, private lands east of Routes 613 and 731 will receive a 7-week season with full antlerless opportunities to help reduce deer abundance where necessary.

(iii) The private land deer population indices in Greene, Hanover, Henrico, and James City counties have exceeded population objectives in the Department's deer management plan for a number of years, despite full-season, either-sex deer hunting seasons and the earn a buck requirement. These counties continue to experience human population growth and suburban/exurban development and a high number of associated human-deer conflicts, such as vehicle collisions and residential conflicts. Additionally, it is important to reduce deer abundance in Greene County given its proximity to CWD DMA2 to reduce the likelihood of the disease spreading further. The addition of early and late antlerless-only seasons is the next step to address deer populations in these counties.

(iv) The "public lands" and "private lands" distinctions in Carroll and Roanoke counties did not accurately convey the intent of this regulation. As described correctly in the hunting laws digest, only "national forests and department-owned lands" were to retain the

shorter seasons while the remaining private and public lands (e.g., county lands, state parks) were eligible for 4-week deer firearm seasons if they choose to allow deer hunting.

**4VAC15-90-70**

**Game: Deer: Archery hunting.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) simplify the regulation by clarifying that the late archery season is only open in areas where the general firearms deer season closes before the first Saturday in January and (ii) clarify language regarding the "carry" of firearms during the archery season for deer to ensure consistency with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**Proposed language of the amendment:**

**4VAC15-90-70. Archery hunting.**

A. It shall be lawful to hunt deer during the early special archery season with archery equipment or a slingbow from the first Saturday in October through the Friday prior to the third Monday in November, both dates inclusive.

B. In addition to the season provided in subsection A of this section, it shall be lawful to hunt deer during the late special archery season with archery equipment or a slingbow~~:~~

~~1. From~~ from the [~~Sunday~~] [day] following the close of the general firearms season on deer through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive, ~~(i)~~ in all cities, towns, and counties, or portions thereof, where the general firearms deer season closes before the first Saturday in January [,unless otherwise noted in this subsection]. ~~west of the Blue Ridge Mountains (except Clarke County and on non-national forest lands in Frederick County); (ii) in the Counties (including the cities and towns within) of Amherst (west of Business U.S. 29 from the James River to its intersection with U.S. 29 just south of the Town of Amherst continuing north on U.S. 29 to the Tye River), Bedford, Franklin, Henry, Nelson (west of Route 151), and Patrick; (iii) on the Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area; and (iv) on national forest lands in Frederick County.~~

~~2. From December 1 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive, in the Cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk (east of the Dismal Swamp Line), and Virginia Beach.~~

[1. From the day following the third Saturday of the general firearms season on deer through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive, in the counties (including the cities and towns within) of Alleghany, Bath, Bland, Buchanan, Dickenson, Highland, Lee, Rockingham (west of Routes 613 and 731), Rockbridge, Russell, Scott, Tazewell, and Wise.]

C. Deer of either sex may be taken full season during the special archery seasons as provided in subsections A and B of this section.

D. It shall be unlawful to ~~carry~~ use firearms to hunt any game species while hunting with archery equipment during the special archery seasons, except that a muzzleloading gun, as defined in 4VAC15-90-80, may be ~~in the possession of~~ used by a properly licensed muzzleloading gun hunter to hunt for deer when and where a special archery deer season overlaps a special muzzleloading deer season.

E. It shall be unlawful to use dogs when hunting with archery equipment during any special archery season, except that tracking dogs as described in § 29.1-516.1 of the Code of Virginia may be used.

F. It shall be lawful to hunt antlerless deer during the special urban archery season with archery equipment or a slingbow from the first Saturday in September through the Friday prior to the first Saturday in October, both dates inclusive, and from the Sunday following the first Saturday in January through the last Sunday in March, both dates inclusive, within the incorporated limits of any city or town in the Commonwealth (except on national forest and department-owned lands) and counties with a human population density of 300 persons per square mile or more (except on national forest and department-owned lands), provided that its governing body submits by certified letter to the department prior to April 1, its intent to participate in the special urban archery season. Any city, town, or county no longer participating in this season shall submit by certified letter to the department prior to April 1 notice of its intent not to participate in the special urban archery season. When consistent with the department's deer management objectives and subject to the director's approval, a participating county may exclude from this season a geographic area by submitting a clear description of such area in a certified letter to the department prior to April 1.

G. It shall be lawful to hunt antlerless deer during the special urban archery season with archery equipment or a slingbow during dates specified in subsection F of this section within the boundaries of any common interest community as defined in § 54.1-2345 of the Code of Virginia provided that (i) the association submits by certified letter to the department prior to July 1 the association's request to participate in the special urban archery season and (ii) the department approves such request.

1. The special urban archery season will in no way supersede any local ordinance, any restriction in the association's governing documents, or the requirement to obtain a landowner's permission to hunt.

2. An association no longer participating in the special urban archery season shall submit notice of the association's intent not to participate in the special urban archery season. The association shall submit the certified letter to the department prior to July 1.

3. At its discretion, the department may suspend or revoke the special urban archery season in any association upon written notice to the association.
For the purposes of this subsection, "association" means the governing board or the authorized agent of the governing board of an association of property owners, condominium unit owners, or proprietary lessees.

H. It shall be lawful to hunt antlerless deer during the special antlerless archery season with archery equipment or a slingbow from the Monday following the last Sunday in March through the last Sunday in April, both dates inclusive, in the Counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William (including the cities and towns within).

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed with the following modifications: 1) Change the start of the late archery season to the day after, rather than the Sunday after, the general firearms season closes to prevent a gap in deer hunting opportunity in Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach. Unlike most localities, where**

**firearms deer season always ends on a Saturday, the firearms season in these three cities always ends on November 30. 2) Provide an overlap in archery and firearms deer season in 13 western counties where the firearms season is proposed to extend to four weeks without full-season either-sex days. This overlap will maintain the current level of either-sex hunting opportunities for late season archery hunters in these counties. In all other counties where the firearms season is proposed to extend to four or seven weeks, every day is an either-sex day, so late season archers will not lose any opportunity in these localities.**

**Rationale:**

(i) With the general firearms deer season proposed to extend to 7 weeks in all or part of 14 western counties (4VAC15-90-10), the late special archery season will no longer be applicable in those areas. Rather than complicate the archery regulation with more exceptions, this proposal simply clarifies that the late archery season is only open in areas where the general firearms season closes before the first Saturday in January.

(ii) It is well established through historical application and case law that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution provides for the right to keep and bear arms and that this right shall not be infringed. While the right to keep and bear arms isn't unlimited and there are certain circumstances and situations where such right is restricted, these restrictions apply to background checks, felony convictions, and possession in sensitive locations. As recent case law continues to clarify that such restrictions don't apply to department-owned and managed lands or hunting situations, Department staffs have reviewed relevant regulations to ensure the consistency of these regulations with an individual's right under the Second Amendment. While an individual's rights under Second Amendment may permit possession of a firearm in many circumstances, the right to such possession doesn't authorize the use of a firearm for hunting. Lawful use of firearms for hunting remains controlled by applicable laws and regulations.

**4VAC15-90-80**

**Game: Deer: Muzzleloading gun hunting.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) simplify the regulation by clarifying that the late muzzleloading season is only open in areas where the general firearms deer season closes before the first Saturday in January, (ii) provide full season either-sex hunting opportunity during the early muzzleloading season on private lands in Craig and Giles counties, (iii) provide for two either-sex deer hunting days in Buchanan County, one each during the early and late muzzleloading seasons, (iv) provide for one either-sex deer hunting day during the late muzzleloading season on federal lands in Dickenson County, (v) update the definitions of muzzleloading rifles and revolvers to better reflect the muzzleloading firearms applicable to the muzzleloading season, and (vi) clarify language regarding the "carry" of firearms during the muzzleloading season for deer to ensure consistency with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**Proposed language of the amendment:**

**4VAC15-90-80. Muzzleloading gun hunting.**

A. It shall be lawful to hunt deer during the early special muzzleloading season with muzzleloading guns from the Saturday prior to the first Monday in November through the Friday prior to the third Monday in November, both dates inclusive, in all cities, towns, and counties where deer hunting with a rifle or muzzleloading gun is permitted, except in the Cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk (east of the Dismal Swamp Line), and Virginia Beach.

B. It shall be lawful to hunt deer during the late special muzzleloading season with muzzleloading guns starting 21 consecutive days immediately prior to and on the first Saturday in January~~:~~

~~1. In~~ in all cities, towns, and counties, or portions thereof, where the general firearms deer season closes before the first Saturday in January. ~~west of the Blue Ridge Mountains (except Clarke County and on non-national forest lands in Frederick County);~~

~~2. East of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the Counties (including the cities and towns within) of Amherst (west of Business U.S. 29 from the James River to its intersection with U.S. 29 just south of the Town of Amherst continuing north on U.S. 29 to the Tye River), Bedford, Franklin, Henry, Nelson (west of Route 151), and Patrick;~~

~~3. On national forest lands in Frederick County; and~~

~~4. In the Cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk (east of the Dismal Swamp Line), and Virginia Beach.~~

C. Deer of either sex may be taken during the entire early special muzzleloading season east of the Blue Ridge Mountains unless otherwise noted in this subsection:

1. Deer of either sex may be taken on the second Saturday only of the early special muzzleloading season on state forest lands, state park lands (except Occoneechee State Park), department-owned lands (except on Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area), and Philpott Reservoir.

2. Antlered bucks only—no either-sex deer hunting days during the early special muzzleloading season on national forest lands in Amherst, Bedford, and Nelson Counties.

D. Deer of either sex may be taken on the second Saturday only during the early special muzzleloading season west of the Blue Ridge Mountains unless otherwise noted in this subsection.

1. Deer of either sex may be taken during the entire early special muzzleloading season in Clarke and Floyd Counties and on private lands in Augusta, Botetourt, Carroll, Craig, Frederick, Giles, Grayson, Montgomery, Page, Pulaski, Roanoke, [Rockbridge, ] Rockingham (east of Routes 613 and 731), Scott, Smyth, Shenandoah, Warren, and Wythe Counties.

2. Antlered bucks only—no either-sex deer hunting days during the early special muzzleloading season ~~in Buchanan County;~~ on federal lands in Dickenson County; on department-owned land in Russell County; on national forest lands in Alleghany, Bland, Craig, Frederick, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Montgomery, Page, Pulaski, Rockingham, Scott, Shenandoah, Warren, and Wise Counties; on national forest and department-owned lands in Augusta, Bath, Botetourt, Carroll, Highland (except Highland Wildlife Management Area), Roanoke, Rockbridge, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, and Wythe Counties; on Channels State Forest, Grayson Highlands State Park, Hungry Mother State Park; and on private lands west of Routes 613 and 731 in Rockingham County.

E. Deer of either sex may be taken during the last six days of the late special muzzleloading season unless otherwise listed in this subsection:

1. Deer of either sex may be taken full season during the entire late special muzzleloading season in the Counties (including the cities and towns within) of ~~Amherst (west of Business U.S. 29 from the James River to its intersection with U.S. 29 just south of the Town of Amherst continuing north on U.S. 29 to the Tye River, except on national forest lands), Bedford (except on national forest lands), Floyd, Franklin,~~ Henry~~, Nelson (west of Route 151, except on national forest lands),~~ and Patrick ~~and;~~ on private lands in Augusta, Botetourt, ~~Carroll,~~ Craig, Giles, Grayson, ~~Montgomery, Page, Pulaski, Roanoke, Rockingham (east of Routes 613 and 731),~~[ Rockbridge,] Scott, and Smyth~~, Shenandoah, Warren, and Wythe~~ Counties; and on federal and department-owned lands in Franklin County.

2. Deer of either sex may be taken the last day only during the late special muzzleloading season in Alleghany, Bath, Buchanan, Highland, Lee, Russell, Tazewell, and Wise Counties; on national forest lands in Amherst, Bedford, Bland, Craig, Frederick, Giles, Grayson, Montgomery, Nelson, Page, Pulaski, Rockingham, Scott, Shenandoah, and Warren Counties; on national forest and department-owned lands in Augusta, Botetourt, Carroll, Roanoke, [Rockbridge, ]Smyth, Washington, and Wythe Counties; on federal lands in Dickenson

County; and on private lands west of Routes 613 and 731 in Rockingham County, Channels State Forest, Grayson Highlands State Park, and Hungry Mother State Park.

~~3. Antlered bucks only – no either-sex deer hunting days during the late special muzzleloading season in Buchanan County.~~

F. Deer of either sex may be taken full season during the special muzzleloading seasons within the incorporated limits of any city or town in the Commonwealth that allows deer hunting except in the Cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach.

G. It shall be unlawful to hunt deer with dogs during any special season for hunting with muzzleloading guns, except that tracking dogs as described in § 29.1-516.1 of the Code of Virginia may be used.

H. Muzzleloading guns, for the purpose of this section, include:

1. ~~Single shot muzzleloading~~ Muzzleloading rifles (one or more barrels) .40 caliber or larger, firing a single projectile or sabot (with a.35 caliber or larger projectile) where the projectile is loaded from the muzzle;

2. Muzzleloading shotguns (one or more barrels) not larger than 10 gauge where the projectiles are loaded from the muzzle;

3. Muzzleloading pistols (one or more barrels).45 caliber or larger, firing a single projectile or sabot (with a.35 caliber or larger projectile) per barrel where the propellant and projectile are loaded from the muzzle;

4. Muzzleloading revolvers ~~.45~~.44 caliber or larger, firing a single projectile or sabot (with a.35 caliber or larger projectile) per cylinder where the propellant and projectile are loaded from the forward end of the cylinder.

I. It shall be unlawful to ~~have in immediate possession~~ hunt deer with any firearm other than a muzzleloading gun ~~while hunting with a muzzleloading gun in a~~ during the special muzzleloading deer season.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed with the following modification: 1) Increase either-sex days in both the early and late muzzleloader seasons for private lands in Rockbridge County to full season to help meet deer population objectives with a modest increase in antlerless harvest (in conjunction with an increase of firearms either-sex days from 3 to 8); 2) Provide 1 either-sex day on National Forest and Department-owned lands in Rockbridge County which rectifies an oversight during previous regulation cycles and makes public land either-sex opportunity with muzzleloaders in Rockbridge consistent with all other counties west of the Blue Ridge.**

**Rationale:**

(i) With the general firearms deer season proposed to extend to 7 weeks in all or part of 14 western counties (4VAC15-90-10), the late muzzleloading season will no longer be applicable in those areas. Rather than complicate the muzzleloading regulation with

more exceptions, this proposal simply clarifies that the late muzzleloading season is only open in areas where the general firearms season closes before the first Saturday in January. This proposal also removes references to either-sex days during the late muzzleloading season in these affected counties.

(ii) Deer populations in Craig and Giles counties have remained above the publicly desired population levels stated in Virginia's Deer Management Plan for many years. Additional antlerless deer harvest opportunity is necessary to achieve the desired population level. Also, these counties are adjacent to two CWD disease management areas in Southwest Virginia where reduced population levels would benefit CWD management efforts through reduced direct contact between deer.

(iii) Although the deer population in Buchanan County is currently meeting objective in the Department's deer management plan, the population is increasing and can support an incremental increase in antlerless harvest, which will also provide additional recreational opportunity. Because Buchanan County has had no either-sex days outside of archery season for some time, it is deemed more appropriate to add either-sex days during the muzzleloader seasons than during the general firearms season. This first step aligns with the approach used during recent regulation cycles in adjoining counties.

(iv) This proposal will rectify an oversight during the last regulation cycle. Dickenson County was removed from subsection E.2 of this regulation because private lands were proposed for the standard six either-sex days during the late muzzleloader season (subsection E). Federal lands, including Flannagan Reservoir and National Forests, were intended to retain only one either-sex day; therefore, this proposal adds these lands back into subsection E.2.

(v) The current regulation language indicates that muzzleloading rifles must be a single shot weapon. However, double barrel muzzleloading rifles are manufactured, and it isn't the Department's intent to preclude double barreled muzzleloaders from being used during the special muzzleloading season. Further, muzzleloading revolvers shooting a .45 caliber projectile are routinely sold as .44 caliber muzzleloading revolvers, causing confusion regarding whether a .44 caliber muzzleloading revolver meets the regulatory requirement for use during the special muzzleloader season. The proposal will bring the regulation language in line with the department's intent of allowing double barreled muzzleloading rifles to be used during and clarifying that a .44 caliber muzzleloading revolver is a legal weapon for the special muzzleloading season.

(vi) It is well established through historical application and case law that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution provides for the right to keep and bear arms and that this right shall not be infringed. While the right to keep and bear arms isn't unlimited and there are certain circumstances and situations where such right is restricted, these restrictions apply to background checks, felony convictions, and possession in sensitive locations. As recent case law continues to clarify that such restrictions don't apply to department-owned and managed lands or hunting situations, Department staffs have reviewed relevant regulations to ensure the consistency of these regulations with an individual's right under the Second Amendment. While an individual's rights under

Second Amendment may permit possession of a firearm in many circumstances, the right to such possession doesn't authorize the use of a firearm for hunting. Lawful use of firearms for hunting remains controlled by applicable laws and regulations.

**4VAC15-90-89**

**Game: Deer: Earn a buck**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) implement the Earn A Buck regulation in Chesterfield, Craig, Giles, and Spotsylvania Counties; and (ii) clarify that deer taken on kill permits do not fulfill Earn a Buck requirements.

**Proposed language of the amendment:**

**4VAC15-90-89. Earn a buck.**

A. For the purposes of this section, the term "license year" means the period between July 1 and June 30 of the following year.

B. Within a license year and within in each individual county listed in this subsection, a hunter must have taken at least one antlerless deer on private lands in that county before taking a second antlered deer on private lands in that county. In those counties listed in this subsection east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a hunter must have taken at least two antlerless deer on private lands in that county before taking a third antlered deer on private lands in that county.

The counties subject to the provisions of this subsection are Accomack, Albemarle, Amherst (west of Route 29), Augusta, Bedford, Botetourt, Carroll, Chesterfield, Clarke, Craig, Culpeper, Fauquier, Floyd, Franklin, Frederick, Giles, Grayson, Greene, Hanover, Henrico, James City, Madison, Montgomery, Orange, Page, Prince George, Pulaski, Rappahannock, Roanoke, Rockingham (east of Routes 613 and 731), Shenandoah, Spotsylvania, Stafford, Warren, Wythe, and York.

C. Within a license year and within each individual county listed in this subsection, a hunter must have taken at least one antlerless deer in that county before taking a second antlered deer in that county. A hunter must also have taken at least two antlerless deer in that county before taking a third antlered deer in that county.--

The counties subject to the provisions of this subsection are Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William (except on Department of Defense lands).

D. Within a license year and within any city or town, except the Cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach, a hunter must have taken at least one antlerless deer in that city or town before taking a second antlered deer in that city or town. In those cities and towns east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a hunter must have taken at least two antlerless deer in that city or town before taking a third antlered deer in that city or town.

E. The Earn A Buck Program does not apply to the Cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach.

F. Deer taken under provisions of § 29.1-529 of the Code of Virginia do not fulfill the requirements of Earn a Buck.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

(i) Chesterfield County and Spotsylvania County are two of the fastest growing/developing counties in Virginia and the deer population is currently above objective. Increasing antlerless harvest is necessary to help alleviate human conflicts with deer in these urbanizing counties. Deer populations in Craig and Giles County have remained above objective for a number of years. In addition, these counties are adjacent to a CWD disease management area. The next step to address deer population levels and be proactive regarding CWD risks is to include these two counties in the Earn a Buck regulation.

(ii) The taking of deer on kill permits is not considered hunting, and as such, the intent has never been for such deer to count toward Earn a Buck requirements. This proposal addresses questions the Department has received in recent years.

**4VAC15-90-91**

**Game: Deer: General firearms season either-sex deer hunting days.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) increase the either-sex deer hunting days for 29 counties, four (4) Wildlife Management Areas, and Cumberland State Forest as shown in the table below, (ii) edit the text outlining which three (3) days of the season hunters are allowed to hunt deer of either-sex in Lee County, and (iii) include references to National Forest lands in Dickenson and Wise Counties to maintain antlered deer only (no either-sex days) hunting on these lands.

| City/County/WMA | Change | Current | Proposed |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alleghany | Increase | 2 | 3 |
| Amelia | Increase | 15 | 31 |
| Amherst (east of Business 29) | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Bath | Increase | 2 | 3 |
| Bland | Increase | 3 | 8 |
| Campbell (east of NS Railroad) | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Cumberland | Increase | 15 | 31 |
| Dickenson | Increase | 0 | 1 |
| Fluvanna | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Gloucester | Increase | 15 | 31 |
| Greensville | Increase | 8 | Full season |
| Halifax | Increase | 15 | Full season |
| Highland | Increase | 2 | 3 |
| King George | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Lancaster | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Lee | Same | 3 | 3 |
| Louisa | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Nelson (east of Rt. 151) | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Northumberland | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Nottoway | Increase | 15 | 31 |
| Pittsylvania (east of NS Railroad) | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Richmond | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Rockbridge | Increase | 3 | Full season |
| Rockingham (west of Rts. 613 and 731) | Increase | 2 | 3 |
| Russell | Increase | 3 | 8 |
| Scott | Increase | 7 | 8 |
| Tazewell | Increase | 3 | 8 |
| Washington | Increase | 8 | Full season |
| Westmoreland | Increase | 31 | Full season |
| Wise | Increase | 0 | 1 |
| **Public Land** | **Change** | **Current** | **Proposed** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Amelia WMA | Increase | 8 | 15 |
| Highland WMA | Increase | 2 | 3 |
| Turkeycock WMA | Increase | 7 | 8 |
| White Oak Mountain WMA | Increase | 4 | 5 |
| Cumberland State Forest | Increase | 2 | 3 |
| Dickenson – National Forest | Same | 0 | 0 |
| Wise – National Forest | Same | 0 | 0 |

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-90-91. General firearms season either-sex deer hunting days.**

A. During the general firearms deer season, deer of either sex may be taken within:

Accomack County: full season.

Albemarle County: full season.

Alleghany County: the second Saturday, ~~and the~~ ~~last day~~ second Friday, and third Saturday.

-National forest lands: the last day.

Amelia County: the second and third Saturdays and the last ~~13~~ 29 days.

-Amelia WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last ~~six~~ 13 days.

Amherst County (east of Business U.S. 29 from the James River to its intersection with U.S. 29 just south of the Town of Amherst continuing north on U.S. 29 to the Tye River): ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

Amherst County (west of Business U.S. 29 from the James River to its intersection with U.S. 29 just south of the Town of Amherst continuing north on U.S. 29 to the Tye River): full season.

-National forest lands: the last day.

Appomattox County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

-Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest: the second and third Saturdays.

-Featherfin WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days.

Arlington County: full season.

Augusta County: full season.

-National forest and department-owned lands: the last day.

Bath County: the second Saturday, ~~and the~~ ~~last day~~ second Friday, and third Saturday.

-National forest and department-owned lands: the last day.

Bedford County: full season.

-National forest lands: the last day.

Bland County: the second Saturday ~~and the last two days~~ through the third Saturday.

-National forest lands: the second Saturday and the last two days.

Botetourt County: full season.

-National forest and department-owned lands: the last day.

Brunswick County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

Buchanan County: antlered bucks only—no either-sex days. Only deer with antlers above the hairline may be taken.

Buckingham County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

-Horsepen Lake WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

-Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest: the second and third Saturdays.

-Featherfin WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days.

Campbell County (east of Norfolk Southern Railroad): ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

Campbell County (west of Norfolk Southern Railroad): full season.

Caroline County: the second and third Saturdays and the last [~~six~~] [13] days.

-~~Mattaponi WMA~~ Department-owned lands: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

Carroll County: full season.

-National forest and department-owned lands: the second Saturday and the last day.

Charles City County: full season.

-Chickahominy WMA: antlered bucks only—no either-sex days. Only deer with antlers above the hairline may be taken.

Charlotte County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

Chesapeake (City of): full season.

-Cavalier WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days.

Chesterfield County: full season.

Clarke County: full season.

Craig County: full season.

-National forest and department-owned lands: the second Saturday and the last two days.

Culpeper County: full season.

-Chester F. Phelps WMA: the second Saturday.
Cumberland County: the second and third Saturdays and the last ~~13~~ 29 days.

-Cumberland State Forest: the second, ~~and~~ third, and fourth Saturdays.

Dickenson County: ~~antlered bucks only—no either-sex days. Only deer with antlers above the hairline may be taken.~~ the third Saturday.

-Federal lands: antlered bucks only—no either-sex days. Only deer with antlers above the hairline may be taken.

Dinwiddie County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

Essex County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

Fairfax County: full season.

Fauquier County: full season.

-G. Richard Thompson WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days.

-Chester F. Phelps WMA: the second Saturday.

Floyd County: full season.

Fluvanna County: ~~second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

-Hardware River WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days.

Franklin County: full season.

-Philpott Reservoir: the second Saturday and the last six days.

-Turkeycock Mountain WMA: the second and third Saturday and the last six days.

Frederick County: full season.

-National forest lands: the last day.

Giles County: full season.

-National forest lands: the second Saturday and the last two days.

Gloucester County: the second and third Saturdays and the last ~~13~~ 29 days.

Goochland County: full season.

Grayson County: full season.

-National forest lands and Grayson Highlands State Park: the last day.

Greene County: full season.

Greensville County: ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last six days~~ full season.

Halifax County: ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days~~. full season.

Hanover County: full season.

Henrico County: full season.

Henry County: the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days.

-Fairystone Farms WMA, Fairystone State Park, and Philpott Reservoir: the second Saturday and the last six days.

-Turkeycock Mountain WMA: the second and third Saturday and the last six days.

Highland County: the second Saturday, ~~and the last day~~ second Friday, and third Saturday.

-National forest lands: the last day.

-Department-owned lands: the second Saturday, ~~and the last day~~ second Friday, and third Saturday.

Isle of Wight County: full season.

-Ragged Island WMA: antlered bucks only—no either-sex days. Only deer with antlers above the hairline may be taken.

James City County: full season.

King and Queen County: the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days.

King George County: ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

King William County: the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days.

Lancaster County: ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

Lee County: the second Saturday, ~~and the last two days~~ second Friday, and third Saturday.

-National forest lands: antlered bucks only—no either-sex days. Only deer with antlers above the hairline may be taken.

Loudoun County: full season.

Louisa County: ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

Lunenburg County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

Madison County: full season.

-Rapidan WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days.

Mathews County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

Mecklenburg County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

-Dick Cross WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

Middlesex County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

Montgomery County: full season.

-National forest lands: the second Saturday and the last day.

Nelson County (east of Route 151): ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

-James River WMA and Tye River WMA: the second Saturday and the last six days.

Nelson County (west of Route 151): full season.

-National forest lands: the last day.

New Kent County: full season.

Northampton County: full season.

Northumberland County: ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

Nottoway County: the second and third Saturdays and the last ~~13~~ 29 days.

Orange County: full season.

Page County: full season.

-National forest lands: the last day.

Patrick County: the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days.

-Fairystone Farms WMA, Fairystone State Park, and Philpott Reservoir: the second Saturday and the last six days.

Pittsylvania County (east of Norfolk Southern Railroad): ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

-White Oak Mountain WMA: the second and third Saturday and the last three days.

Pittsylvania County (west of Norfolk Southern Railroad): full season.

Powhatan County: full season.

-Powhatan WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days.

Prince Edward County: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

-Briery Creek WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last six days.

-Featherfin WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days.

-Prince Edward State Forest: the second and third Saturdays.

Prince George County: full season.

Prince William County: full season.

Pulaski County: full season.

-National forest lands: the second Saturday and the last day.

Rappahannock County: full season.

Richmond County: ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

Roanoke County: full season.

-National forest and department-owned lands: the last day.

Rockbridge County: ~~the second Saturday and the last two days~~ [~~full season~~][the second Saturday through the third Saturday].

-National forest and department-owned lands: the last day.

Rockingham County: full season.

-National forest lands: the last day.

-Private lands west of Routes 613 and 731: the second Saturday, ~~and the last day~~ second Friday, and third Saturday.

Russell County: the second Saturday ~~and the last two days~~ through the third Saturday.

-Department-owned lands and the Channels State Forest: the last day.

Scott County: the second Saturday ~~and the last six days~~ through the third Saturday.

-National forest lands: antlered bucks only—no either-sex days. Only deer with antlers above the hairline may be taken.

Shenandoah County: full season.

-National forest lands: the last day.

Smyth County: full season.

-National forest lands, department-owned lands, and Hungry Mother State Park: the last day.

Southampton County: full season.

Spotsylvania County: full season.

-Oakley Forest WMA: the second and third Saturdays and the last 13 days.

Stafford County: full season.

Suffolk: full season.

Surry County: full season.

-Carlisle and Stewart Tracts of the Hog Island WMA: antlered bucks only—no either-sex days. Only deer with antlers above the hairline may be taken.

Sussex County: full season.

-Big Woods WMA, Flippo-Gentry WMA, and Big Woods State Forest: full season.

Tazewell County: the second Saturday ~~and the last two days~~ through the third Saturday.

-National forest and department-owned lands: the last day.

Virginia Beach (City of): full season.

Warren County: full season.

-National forest lands: the last day.

Washington County: ~~the second Saturday and the last six days~~ full season.

-National forest lands, department-owned lands, and the Channels State Forest: the last day.

Westmoreland County: ~~the second and third Saturdays and the last 29 days~~ full season.

Wise County: ~~antlered bucks only—no either-sex days. Only deer with antlers above the hairline may be taken.~~ the third Saturday.

-National forest lands: antlered bucks only—no either-sex days. Only deer with antlers above the hairline may be taken.

Wythe County: full season.

-National forest and department-owned lands: the second Saturday and the last two days.

York County: full season.

B. Except as provided in the subsection A of this section, deer of either sex may be taken full season during the general firearms deer season within the incorporated limits of any city or town, state park, national wildlife refuge, or military installation that allows deer hunting or within any common interest community participating in the special urban archery season according to provisions of 4VAC15-90-70.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed with the following modifications: 1) Increase either-sex days in Caroline County from the current 8 days to a total of 15 days to bring regulations in-line with adjacent counties like King William and King and Queen, and to proactively address crop depredation issues experienced in the county; 2) Amend the increase in firearms either-sex days in Rockbridge County from full season to 8 days for a more modest increase in antlerless harvest.**

**Rationale:**

**Private Lands**

Alleghany. The private land deer population index is currently being met in Alleghany at the moderate to high level. However, the cultural carrying capacity is likely exceeding the biological carrying capacity, i.e., the public desires more deer than can be sustained without damage to habitat. The proposed increase in either-sex days by one additional day will allow increased opportunity for harvest while also better aligning populations with the habitat.

Amelia. The private land deer population index is currently being met in Amelia at the moderate to high level but is trending towards high. While reported deer vehicle collisions have remained fairly constant (15-20 per year), census data from the 2020 census shows a slightly increasing human population. The proposed increase in either-sex days is a proactive change to address the increasing urbanization of this area and continue to meet the deer population objective. This would also continue to maintain consistency of regulations in the counties of Amelia, Cumberland, and Nottoway with similar habitat conditions and deer densities.

Amherst. Deer populations continue to remain high and above the current deer plan population objective (moderate) for Amherst County. Deer vehicle collisions have significantly increased during the last reporting cycle jumping from 83 to 126 in a one-year span. The increase to full season either-sex firearms hunting will simplify regulations and make the seasons consistent across the whole county, which currently has a split season east and west of Rt. 29. This proposal will also align with proposals for Campbell, Nelson, and Pittsylvania County to make regulations consistent across those entire counties, as well.

Bath. The private land deer population index is currently lower than objective (moderate to high), but much like Alleghany, due to habitat constraints, the cultural carrying capacity likely exceeds the biological carrying capacity. The addition of one either-sex firearms deer hunting day will better align the deer population with the habitat, while also keeping regulations consistent across the Alleghany, Bath, and Highland area.

Bland. Per the CWD management plan, private land deer population objectives in all disease management area counties are set no higher than moderate. Bland is currently over this objective at the moderate to high level and is included in DMA 4 in southwest Virginia. Deer vehicle collisions have also nearly doubled over the last 2-year reporting period. An increase in either-sex firearms hunting days should assist in meeting the desired population objective and reducing conflicts such as collisions and agricultural damage.

Campbell. Deer populations have exceeded the private land population objective of moderate since 2021 and deer vehicle collisions have trended upward from a reported low of 33 in 2019 to 70 in 2023. The increase in either-sex firearms hunting days to full season county wide will align with changes proposed in Amherst, Nelson, and Pittsylvania County while simultaneously simplifying regulations within each

county. Law enforcement staff strongly supported the consistent season structure across the county to simplify regulations for hunters and enforcement staff alike.

Cumberland. While Cumberland is currently meeting its private land deer population objective (moderate to high) it has been trending closer to high since 2021. Deer vehicle collisions have doubled over the past 2 reporting cycles (10 in 2021 to 19 and 20 in 2022 and 2023, respectively). The proposed increase in firearms either-sex hunting days would maintain consistency of regulations in the counties of Amelia, Cumberland, and Nottoway with similar habitat conditions and deer densities.

Dickenson. During the 2024 regulation scoping public comment period, a large number of comments came from the coalfield region of Virginia asking for the opportunity to take antlerless deer during the firearms deer season. Dickenson has had buck only hunting during the firearms season throughout its history due to historically low deer densities. With increased habitat management efforts on private and public lands in this region, particularly PALs lands, deer populations are rebounding. While Dickenson is meeting its population objective (moderate), it is actually trending to the higher end of this objective. Starting conservatively by proposing a single either-sex day during the firearms seasons should allow increased opportunity as requested by constituents in this area while still meeting the management objective as prescribed by the current deer plan.

Fluvanna. The private land deer population objective is currently higher than prescribed and has been for the past two seasons. Census data shows an increasing population trend for this area although deer vehicle collisions have moderated over the past few years with an average of 36 per year since 2020. The proposed increase to full season either-sex would be a proactive management action to continue to meet the private land deer population objective in an area that is quickly increasing in human density and urbanization.

Gloucester. While Gloucester is currently meeting its private land deer population objective (moderate), census data, deer vehicle collisions, and agricultural damage and complaints have all been increasing substantially since the past regulation cycle. The proposal to increase either-sex day opportunities to full season would be a proactive management change to mitigate the increasing urbanization and conflicts for this area.

Greensville. The private land deer population index has rebounded following a hemorrhagic disease outbreak in 2014 and, while currently meeting its objective (moderate), it is trending higher and close to above objective for the past 2 seasons. Deer vehicle collisions have high reporting variability in this area with a peak of 52 reported in 2019, down to 31 reported in 2024. This is still higher than the lowest reports which occurred immediately following the HD outbreak, with reported incidents below 20 from 2014 to 2017. Constituent requests for increased antlerless opportunities have been high in recent years and as hunting participation wanes, the need for more liberal either-sex hunting days will continue to be needed to meet management objectives.

Halifax. Either-sex firearms hunting opportunities have varied over time in Halifax going from highly conservative opportunities (6 days) in the early 1990s to full season by 2011. Following a hemorrhagic disease outbreak in 2016, either-sex days were reduced to allow population recovery. Populations have since rebounded and are currently meeting the management objective (moderate) but trending toward moderate/high. Deer vehicle collisions sharply increased during the 2023 reporting period to 88, the highest number reported since 2008. The proposed increase in either-sex days would be a proactive management action to continue meeting the current population objective and this change would align the either-sex hunting opportunity in Halifax with those in the adjacent counties of Campbell and Pittsylvania.

Highland. The private land deer population index is currently lower than objective (moderate to high), but much like Alleghany and Bath, due to habitat constraints, the cultural carrying capacity likely exceeds the

biological carrying capacity. The addition of one either-sex firearms deer hunting day will better align the deer population with the habitat, while also keeping regulations consistent across the Alleghany, Bath, and Highland area.

King George. The private land deer population index has declined significantly from its peak (5.09 bucks harvested/square mile) in 2009 to meet its current management objective of moderate. During the past two seasons the index has begun to trend higher again, approaching the moderate to high index. While deer vehicle collisions are fairly stable (47 reports per year average since 2017), census data shows a significantly increasing population density. Increasing either-sex opportunities to full season will proactively manage for increased human populations and subsequent urban development, while also keeping regulations consistent throughout the Northern Neck.

Lancaster. The private land deer population index has not been met in Lancaster (moderate) since 2002 and, while coming down from a peak in 2009, still remains above objective and trending higher. While deer vehicle collisions and census data do not show significantly increasing trends, there has been increased development in this area in recent years. Increasing either-sex opportunities to full season should assist in meeting the current population objective, while also keeping regulations consistent throughout the Northern Neck.

Lee. The proposed change for Lee County does not involve any change in the number of either-sex firearms days but is simply rewording the regulation to keep the current days (3) in the second week of the season, rather than moving them to the end of the new proposed four-week firearm season. Local DWR staff acknowledged that hunting is extremely popular during the current second week of the firearms season and that keeping the either-sex days during this timeframe would be more beneficial to constituent desires.

Louisa. Census data shows a significantly increasing human population for Louisa coupled with a record number of deer vehicle collision reports for 2023 (67). While the private land population objective is currently being met (moderate), the deer population trend is increasing. Either-sex days have been at their current number (31) for 8 seasons with little change to the population index. Proactively increasing the either sex days to full season should assist in continuing to meet the population objective while mitigating continued urbanization and human population increases to this area. This proposal would also keep Fluvanna and Lousia regulations consistent, as they have been for many years.

Nelson. Deer populations continue to remain moderate/high and above the current deer plan population objective (moderate) for Nelson County. Deer vehicle collision reports have varied but have approached 50 in recent years. The increase to full season either-sex firearms hunting will simplify regulations and make the seasons consistent across the county, which currently has a split season east and west of Rt. 151. This will align regulations with those proposed for Amherst, Campbell, and Pittsylvania to make regulations consistent across these counties, as well.

Northumberland. The private land deer population index is currently being met (moderate) but trending higher towards moderate/high since 2021. While deer vehicle collisions and census data do not show significantly increasing trends, there has been increased development in this area in recent years. Increasing either-sex opportunities to full season should assist in continuing to meet the current population objective, while also keeping regulations consistent throughout the Northern Neck.

Nottoway. Either-sex firearms hunting days have slowly been increased following a significant hemorrhagic disease outbreak in this area in 2014. Reduced antlerless opportunities allowed the population to recover and now exceed its stated population objective (moderate). While census data shows stable human populations in this area, deer vehicle collisions increased significantly for the 2023 reporting period (74). Increasing either-sex firearms hunting opportunities should assist in meeting the

population management objective. This would also maintain consistency in regulations for Amelia, Cumberland, and Nottoway counties which have similar habitat conditions and deer densities.

Pittsylvania. The private land deer population objective is currently being met but has been consistently on the high side of moderate since 2007. While census data does not show any population increases, deer vehicle collisions doubled over the 2022 to 2023 reporting period. The increase in either-sex firearms hunting days to full season county wide will align with proposals for Amherst, Campbell, and Nelson County while simultaneously simplifying regulations within each county. Law enforcement staff strongly supported the consistent season structure across the county to simplify regulations for hunters and enforcement staff alike.

Richmond. The private land deer population index is currently being met (moderate) but trending higher towards moderate/high. While deer vehicle collisions and census data do not show significantly increasing trends, there has been increased development in this area in recent years. Increasing either-sex opportunities to full season should assist in continuing to meet the current population objective, while also keeping regulations consistent throughout the Northern Neck.

Rockbridge. Either-sex firearms hunting opportunities have historically been limited in Rockbridge, with a high of 8 either sex days allowed from 2003 to 2007. The private land deer population index is currently above objective (moderate) and has been in the moderate to high index since 2019. While census data shows stable human population trajectories, deer vehicle collisions nearly doubled from 109 in 2022 to 195 in 2023. Agricultural damage complaints and requests for out of season kill permits and damage control assistance permits have remained high. The proposed increase in either-sex firearms opportunities should assist in meeting the stated population objective while also making regulations more consistent with the adjoining counties of Augusta and Botetourt.

Rockingham. While the private land deer population index for Rockingham as a whole is above objective (moderate), the western portion of Rockingham has significant management differences that are hard to discern from the countywide harvest and population index. Habitat variability in this heavily forested portion of the county results in a lower carrying capacity and hence restrictive either-sex firearms opportunities. Based on local staff observations in this area along with public comments received during the public scoping period, deer densities could support an additional either-sex firearms opportunity. This would also align with the either-sex days proposed for Alleghany, Bath, and Highland counties.

Russell. The private land deer population index has steadily increased in Russell County since 2013 and is currently approaching moderate/high which is above objective (moderate). While census data shows declining human populations in this area, deer vehicle collisions were the highest reported in 2023 at 85. Conservative either-sex firearms opportunities have successfully increased this population to a point where additional either-sex opportunities are warranted to continue to meet the stated management objective. Comments received during the 2024 regulation scoping period were in favor of additional opportunities throughout the coalfields region. While Russell County is not within a designated CWD DMA, it is adjacent to Tazewell County, which had a positive CWD detection in 2023. Thus, additional either-sex opportunities may be beneficial to stabilize populations in close proximity to a disease management area.

Scott. The proposed increase of 1 additional either-sex day for Scott would align the regulations for Bland, Russell, Scott, and Tazewell counties, simplifying regulations across this entire area. While Scott is meeting its private land deer population objective (moderate to high) there are increasing numbers of agricultural damage complaints and requests for out of season kill permits in this area. Law enforcement staff were highly supportive of keeping regulations consistent across their enforcement districts to the extent possible based on management objectives.

Tazewell. Per the CWD management plan, private land deer population objectives in all disease management area counties are set no higher than moderate. Tazewell is currently over this objective at the moderate to high level and is included in DMA 4 in southwest Virginia due to a positive CWD detection in 2023. Deer vehicle collisions have steadily increased since 2020 with a high of 131 reported in 2023. An increase in either-sex firearms hunting days should assist in meeting the desired population objective and reducing conflicts such as collisions and agricultural damage, while also keeping regulations consistent across Bland, Russell, Scott, and Tazewell.

Washington. The private land deer population index has steadily increased in Washington since 2010 with a more significant increasing trend since 2015. The population objective (moderate) has not been met since 2019 and has trended even higher into the moderate/high range since 2022. While census data shows stable human population densities, deer vehicle collisions have increased to a reported high of 109 in 2023. Agricultural damage complaints are also consistently high in this area. The increase to full season either-sex firearms opportunity should assist in reducing the population to meet the stated management objective.

Westmoreland. The private land deer population index is currently being met (moderate) but trending higher towards moderate/high. While deer vehicle collisions do not show significant trends, census data shows a moderately increasing human population with increased development in this area in recent years. Increasing either-sex opportunities to full season should assist in continuing to meet the current population objective, while also keeping regulations consistent throughout the Northern Neck.

Wise. During the 2024 regulation scoping public comment period, a large number of comments came from the coalfield region of Virginia asking for the opportunity to take antlerless deer during the firearms deer season. Wise has had buck only hunting during the firearms season throughout its history due to historically low deer densities, with the exception of a single either-sex day from 1993-1994. With increased habitat management efforts on private and public lands in this region, deer populations are rebounding. While Wise is meeting its population objective (moderate), it is trending to the higher end of this objective. Starting conservatively with a single either-sex day during the firearms seasons should allow increased opportunity as requested by constituents in this area while still meeting the management objective as prescribed by the current deer plan.

**Public Lands**

Amelia. Local staff recommends increasing either-sex firearms days on the Amelia Wildlife Management Area to match those provided on Powhatan WMA. Hunting pressure seems to be reduced in recent years on the WMA, allowing for the addition of one more week of either-sex opportunity to continue to meet management objectives on the WMA.

Cumberland: Local DWR and DOF staff recommend increasing either-sex firearms days on the Cumberland State Forest by adding one additional Saturday of opportunity. This proposal aligns with the proposed increase of either-sex days on private lands in Cumberland due to an increasing deer population index. The addition of a single Saturday within the middle of the season is proposed to allow increased antlerless harvest opportunity but avoid the end of the season, which typically sees a substantial increase in hunting pressure on this area.

Dickenson: Due to the proposed addition of a single either-sex firearms day on private lands in Dickenson County, the public lands now are listed separately (National Forest lands) as antlered buck only, no antlerless opportunities. In the previous version of this regulation, private and public lands were together as they were both buck only with no antlerless opportunities during the firearms season. There is no proposed change to either-sex days on public lands in Dickenson County at this time.

Highland: Local staff recommends increasing either-sex firearms days on the Highland Wildlife Management Area to match those on private lands in Highland County. This proposal to add a single additional day (Friday) will allow increased opportunity while distributing hunting pressure and continuing to meet management objectives.

Franklin/Henry. Local staff recommends increasing either-sex firearms days on Turkeycock WMA by adding a single additional Saturday. This proposal should allow increased opportunity while distributing hunting pressure and continuing to meet management objectives.

Pittsylvania. Local staff recommends increasing either-sex firearms days on White Oak Mountain WMA by adding a single additional Saturday. This proposal should allow increased opportunity while distributing hunting pressure and continuing to meet management objectives.

Wise: Due to the proposed addition of a single either-sex firearms day on private lands in Wise County, the public lands now are listed separately (National Forest lands) as antlered buck only, no antlerless opportunities. In the previous version of this regulation, private and public lands were together as they were both buck only with no antlerless opportunities during the firearms season. There is no proposed change to either-sex days on public lands in Wise County at this time.

**4 VAC 15-90-530**

**Game: Deer: Special elk hunting license, random drawing license program.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) omit details about applications and drawing of alternates and (ii) provide more flexibility in considering wildlife violations for awarding an opportunity to purchase a special elk hunting license.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-90-530. Special elk hunting license, random drawing license program.**

A. The dates for the ~~annual~~ application period to enter the random drawing for a special elk hunting license shall be published by the department ~~annually~~ and ~~shall be~~ no less than 30 days in duration. Individuals selected for special elk hunting licenses via the random drawing shall be notified no less than 60 days prior to the start of the elk hunt, and special elk hunting licenses must be purchased from the department within 30 days of notification.

~~B. To enter the random drawing for a special elk hunting license, applicants shall:~~

~~1. Complete the application for a special elk hunting license as provided by the department.~~

~~2. Pay a nonrefundable application fee.~~

~~3. Apply only once for each random drawing.~~

C. Nonresidents shall not comprise more than 10%, or one drawn applicant, whichever is greater, of all drawn applicants in any application pool for the random drawing license program.

D. Applicants who physically reside within the Elk Management Zone shall comprise no less than 10%, or a minimum of one, whichever is greater, of all drawn applicants in any application pool for the random drawing license program.

E. A special elk hunting license awarded through the Random Drawing License Program shall not be transferable.

F. An applicant drawn for a special elk hunting license may be rejected if it is determined that the applicant has a hunting license revocation at the time they are drawn, been convicted of ~~two~~ one or more wildlife violations within ~~three~~ five years prior to the last date of the application period, or convicted of one or more violations involving elk. In determining an applicant's eligibility, the ~~director~~ Department shall take into account the nature and severity of the violations.

~~G. The department will award unclaimed special elk hunting licenses to alternates who are drawn~~

~~during the initial application and draw period in the order that the alternates are drawn.~~

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

This regulation was written before the elk hunt in the Elk Management Zone started and there was a greater desire to have details outlined in regulation to eliminate uncertainty and provide assurances for a new hunt. Now that the hunt is coming upon its fourth year, there is much more certainty in how the process moves forward and a greater desire to streamline the regulation. The proposed omission of details involving the basic rules for submitting applications and the process for drawing alternates are all details that can be included in Department guidance documents or policies. Many of these details are already included on the Elk Lottery webpage.

The proposed amendment to the subsection involving wildlife violations serves two purposes: simplifying the language and allowing the Department the appropriate flexibility in being able to take into account wildlife violations for those drawn in the elk lottery. Elk hunting is an extremely limited and highly sought after opportunity that the Commonwealth offers. Not considering previous wildlife violations committed by potential elk license holders would be a disservice to all the law-abiding hunters who apply for the elk lottery and to those landowners who open their properties for elk license holders to hunt on.

**4 VAC 15-90-540**

**Game: Deer: Special elk hunting license, Landowner License Program.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) omit details on the following: applications, point accrual, point system, license draw, and stipulations on lands eligible to be hunted with a landowner license, and (ii) provide more flexibility in considering wildlife violations in awarding an opportunity to purchase a special elk hunting license.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-90-540. Special elk hunting license, Landowner License Program.**

A. Upon receipt of a valid Landowner License Program application from a landowner within the Elk Management Zone, the director or the director's designee shall verify the application materials and have sole discretion in enrolling the property in the Landowner License Program. The application deadline shall be published by the department ~~annually~~ no less than 30 days prior to the deadline.

~~B. A valid Landowner License Program application shall include:~~

~~1. Landowner's name, home address, telephone number, and address of the property to be enrolled in the program.~~

~~2. A recorded survey or other legal documentation certifying the acreage and ownership of the property to be enrolled.~~

~~3. Original signature of the landowner.~~

~~4. Only a single application per license year, per landowner.~~

C. Landowners enrolled in the Landowner License Program maintain the right to limit access to certain areas of the property for safety or privacy reasons. ~~Areas of limited access must be outlined in the initial application.~~ Enrollment in the Landowner License Program does not preclude or limit in any way the landowner from allowing other hunting or other hunters on the property.

D. The department shall determine and make available to the public a program guidance document outlining how landowners enrolled in the Landowner License Program shall accrue points toward a special elk hunting license, the number of points necessary to be awarded such license, ~~a list of criteria by which applications and associated properties will be evaluated for enrollment in the program,~~ and other program requirements. The program guidance document will be published ~~annually~~ no less than 30 days prior to the application deadline.

E. Landowners who accrue the necessary number of points, as defined in the program guidance document, on an enrolled property may enter a landowner lottery for a special elk hunting license~~. Once a special elk hunting license is awarded through the lottery, the landowner loses all~~

~~accrued points. There is no time limit over which a landowner is required to accrue license points. Landowners shall not combine points from separate enrolled properties.~~

F. Landowners enrolled in the Landowner License Program shall not subdivide contiguous properties under the same ownership into multiple, smaller parcels for the purposes of this program.

G. License points cannot be sold or traded. License points are nontransferable if the property changes ownership, except that if the property is inherited from parents, grandparents, or children, resident or nonresident, license points may be transferred. The department may request documentation to certify the relationship between seller and purchaser as well as a copy of bill of sale.

H. Landowners receiving a special elk hunting license shall comply with all of the requirements established in this section as well as 4VAC15-90-510, 4VAC15-90-520, and § 29.1-305.01 of the Code of Virginia. Landowners who fail to comply with this chapter may forfeit any accrued license points and may not be eligible to accrue new license points.

~~I. A special elk hunting license awarded to the landowner shall only be used on the property enrolled with the department in the Landowner License Program.~~

~~J. A landowner may transfer the special elk hunting license to any person eligible to hunt in Virginia. The special elk hunting license may not be sold. Transfer of the special elk hunting license must be reported to the department no less than one month prior to the opening day of the elk hunting season during the year in which the special elk hunting license is awarded. To report a transfer to the department, the landowner shall provide the department with the hunter's:~~

~~1. Name;~~

~~2. Department customer identification number;~~

~~3. Address; and~~

~~4. Telephone number.~~

K. A landowner shall not charge a fee for hunters to hunt elk on properties enrolled in the Landowner License Program ~~except as described in the program guidance document~~.

L. A special elk hunting license transferee may be rejected if it is determined that the transferee has a hunting license revocation at the time they are drawn, been convicted of ~~two~~ one or more wildlife violations within ~~three~~ five years prior to the last date of the application period, or convicted of one or more violations involving elk. In determining the transferee's eligibility, the ~~director~~ Department shall take into account the nature and severity of the violations.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

This regulation was brought forth before the elk hunt in the Elk Management Zone started and there was a greater desire to have details outlined in regulation to eliminate uncertainty associated with a new hunt and program. Now that the hunt is coming upon its fourth year, there is much more certainty in how the process moves forward and a greater desire to streamline the regulation. The proposed omission of details involving applications, point accrual, point system, license draw, and stipulations on lands eligible to be hunted with a landowner license are all details that can be included in Department guidance documents or policies. Much of this information is already contained on the Elk Landowner License Program webpage. Similar programs that the Department administers, such as DMAP, DCAP, and DPOP are not detailed in regulation.

The proposed amendment to the subsection involving wildlife violations serves two purposes: simplifying the language and allowing the Department the appropriate flexibility in being able to take into account wildlife violations for those drawn in the landowner lottery. Elk hunting is an extremely limited and highly sought after opportunity that the Commonwealth offers. Not considering previous wildlife violations committed by potential elk license holders would be a disservice to all the law-abiding hunters who apply for the elk lottery and to those landowners who open their properties for elk license holders to hunt on.

**4 VAC 15-90-550**

**Game: Deer: Special elk hunting license, Conservation License Program.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) omit details on applications, process for transferring the special elk hunting license, and agreements or documentation required from the organization, (ii) specify that raffle proceeds must be spent on elk conservation or elk-related recreation projects, and (iii) provide more flexibility in considering wildlife violations in awarding an opportunity to purchase a special elk hunting license.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-90-550. Special elk hunting license, Conservation License Program.**

A. For the purposes of this section, the following words or terms shall have the following meanings, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

"Individual, cooperators, or wildlife conservation organizations" means those people or entities whose mission is to promote and ensure the conservation of Virginia's wildlife resources or to promote opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping, boating, or other wildlife-related recreation within Virginia.

"Proceeds" means the amount of money received by the cooperator or organization from the transfer of a reserved special elk hunting license minus all expenses, including the fees associated with the license, and administrative costs directly attributable to the transfer of the permit or the implementation of the defined project.

B. Upon receipt of a valid Conservation License Program application from an officer or other designated official representative of any individual, cooperator, or wildlife conservation organization, the director or the director's designee shall verify the application materials and may select a program awardee annually. ~~Applications must be received or postmarked no later than April 1 to be eligible for the Conservation License Program during that calendar year.~~

~~C. A valid Conservation License Program application shall include:~~

~~1. Cooperator or organization name, name of the individual designated to submit and receive official correspondence, address for such correspondence, and a telephone number.~~

~~2. Cooperator or organization mission statement.~~

~~3. A written application describing:~~

~~a. Cooperator or organization role in wildlife conservation in Virginia.~~

~~b. Cooperator or organization purpose and intent for requesting a reserved special elk hunting license through the Conservation License Program.~~

~~c. Cooperator or organization proposal for method of generating funds from transfer of the reserved special elk hunting license to an eligible individual.~~

~~d. Cooperator or organization strategy to direct proceeds received from the transfer of the reserved special elk hunting license and any matching funding toward wildlife conservation or wildlife-related recreation in Virginia's Elk Management Zone.~~

D. The director shall establish a Conservation License Program Committee to review program applications and submit a recommendation to the director to reserve no more than one special elk hunting license for a cooperator or organization whose application is deemed to provide the greatest benefit to elk ~~wildlife~~ conservation and elk ~~wildlife~~-related recreation in Virginia per license year. This committee shall be composed of a minimum of three individuals and make a recommendation to the director ~~by May 1~~ each year.

E. A cooperator or organization receiving a reserved special elk hunting license must direct all proceeds from the transfer of such reservation, toward a project to improve and enhance elk ~~wildlife~~ habitat, elk ~~wildlife~~ populations, or elk ~~wildlife~~-related recreation within the Elk Management Zone. ~~The proposed strategy and requirements will be outlined in a memorandum of agreement between the department and the cooperator or organization.~~

F. In coordination with the Department, a ~~A~~ cooperator or organization may transfer the reserved special elk hunting license to any person eligible to hunt in Virginia. The generation of funds from the transfer of the reserved special elk hunting license may only be conducted through a raffle.

~~G. Transfer of the reserved special elk hunting license must be reported to the department no less than one month prior to the opening day of the elk hunting season during which the special elk hunting license is valid. To report a transfer to the department, the cooperator or organization shall provide the department with the hunter's:~~

~~1. Name;~~

~~2. Department customer identification number;~~

~~3. Address; and~~

~~4. Telephone number.~~

H. A special elk hunting license transferee may be rejected if it is determined that the transferee has a hunting license revocation at the time they are drawn, been convicted of ~~two~~ one or more wildlife violations within ~~three~~ five years prior to the last date of the application period, or convicted of one or more violations involving elk. In determining the transferee's eligibility, the ~~director~~ Department shall take into account the nature and severity of the violations.

~~I. A cooperator or organization that receives a reserved special elk hunting license shall submit~~

~~an annual report to the department regarding any proceeds received from the transfer of the reserved license and an accounting of how those funds were directed toward wildlife conservation or wildlife-related recreation in the Elk Management Zone.~~

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

This regulation was brought forth before the elk hunt in the Elk Management Zone started and there was a greater desire to have details outlined in regulation to eliminate uncertainty associated with a new hunt and program. Now that the hunt is coming upon its fourth year, there is much more certainty in how the process moves forward and a greater desire to streamline the regulation. The proposed omission of details involving the rules for submitting applications, required components of applications, requirements for an organization to award the reserved special elk hunting license, and agreements and documentation required from the organization are all details that can be included in Department guidance documents or policies. Many of these details are already included on the Elk Conservation License Program webpage.

The proposed language change from *wildlife* conservation or *wildlife*-related recreation to *elk* conservation or *elk*-related recreation projects is necessary because there is no consistent or long-term funding mechanism for the elk program and all the work required for it, such as habitat improvement, land access, etc. The Elk Conservation License Program is a wonderful opportunity to provide an organization with a great incentive (special elk hunting license) for people to spend money that will be directed towards projects that help elk populations and the elk hunt itself. The previous three projects executed through the Elk Conservation License Program have all been elk-focused but have improved habitat for many wildlife species. All of the general elk lottery application revenue goes to the Department's general fund and not to the elk program.

The proposed amendment to the subsection involving wildlife violations serves two purposes: simplifying the language and allowing the Department the appropriate flexibility in being able to take into account wildlife violations for those drawn in the elk lottery. Elk hunting is an extremely limited and highly sought after opportunity that the Commonwealth offers. Not considering previous wildlife violations committed by potential elk license holders would be a disservice to all the law-abiding hunters who apply for the elk lottery and to those landowners who open their properties for elk license holders to hunt on.

# Bear Regulations

**4 VAC 15-50-11**

**Game: Bear: Open season; generally.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to remove 25 days from the bear open season in 24 counties, primarily located in the northwestern portion of the state where sarcoptic mange is endemic, (ii) add the 3-day early bear season in the portions of Montgomery, Pulaski, Wythe, Smyth, and Washington that are southeast of I-81; and (iii) add one week to the beginning of the general firearms bear season in the counties of Charlotte, Halifax, Mecklenburg, and Prince Edward and the portions south of I-81 in the counties of Montgomery, Pulaski, Wythe, Smyth, and Washington.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC 15-50-11. Open season; generally.**

A. It shall be lawful to hunt bears in the following localities, including the cities and towns therein, during the following seasons:

| Location | Season |
|---|---|
| Accomack County | Closed |
| Albemarle County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Alleghany County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Amelia County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Amherst County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Appomattox County | Friday following the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~nearest December 2~~ ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Arlington County | The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Augusta County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Bath County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Bedford County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |

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| Bland County | [~~Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the~~] [The] fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Botetourt County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Brunswick County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Buchanan County | Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Buckingham County | Friday following the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~nearest December 2~~ ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Campbell County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Caroline County | Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Carroll County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Charles City County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Charlotte County | ~~Monday nearest December 2~~ Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Chesapeake (City of) | October 1 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Chesterfield County | Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Clarke County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Craig County | [~~Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the~~] [The] fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Culpeper County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Cumberland County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Dickenson County | Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Dinwiddie County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Essex County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |

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| Fairfax County | The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Fauquier County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Floyd County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Fluvanna County | Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Franklin County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Frederick County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Giles County | [~~Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the~~] [The] fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Gloucester County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Goochland County | Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Grayson County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Greene County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Greensville County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Halifax County | ~~Monday nearest December 2~~ Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Hanover County | Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Henrico County | Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Henry County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Highland County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Isle of Wight County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| James City County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| King and Queen County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| King George County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |

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| King William County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Lancaster County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Lee County | Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Loudoun County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Louisa County | Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Lunenburg County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Madison County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Mathews County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Mecklenburg County | ~~Monday nearest December 2~~ Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Middlesex County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| ~~Montgomery County (Southeast of I-81)~~ | ~~Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.~~ |
| Montgomery County ~~(northwest of I-81)~~ | [~~Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the~~] [The] fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Nelson County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| New Kent County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Northampton County | Closed |
| Northumberland County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Nottoway County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Orange County | Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Page County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Patrick County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |

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|---|---|
| Pittsylvania County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Powhatan County | Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Prince Edward County | ~~Monday nearest December 2~~ Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Prince George County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Prince William County | The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| ~~Pulaski County (southeast of I-81)~~ | ~~Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.~~ |
| Pulaski County ~~(northwest of I-81)~~ | [~~Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the~~] [The] fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Rappahannock County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Richmond County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Roanoke County | [~~Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the~~] [The]fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Rockbridge County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Rockingham County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Russell County | Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Scott County | Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Shenandoah County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| ~~Smyth County (southeast of I-81)~~ | ~~Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.~~ |
| Smyth County ~~(northwest of I-81)~~ | [~~Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the~~] [The] fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Southampton County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Spotsylvania County | Fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |

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|---|---|
| Stafford County | The fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Suffolk (City of) | October 1 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Surry County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Sussex County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Tazewell County | [~~Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the~~] [The] fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Virginia Beach (City of) | October 1 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Warren County | Friday following ~~T~~the fourth Monday in November and for two consecutive days following; and 12 days immediately prior to and including ~~through~~ the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| ~~Washington County (southeast of I-81)~~ | ~~Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.~~ |
| Washington County ~~(northwest of I-81)~~ | Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Westmoreland County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| Wise County | Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| ~~Wythe County (southeast of I-81)~~ | ~~Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive.~~ |
| Wythe County ~~(northwest of I-81)~~ | [~~Monday following the last Saturday in September and for two days following; and the~~] [The] fourth Monday in November through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |
| York County | Monday nearest December 2 through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive. |

B. Notwithstanding provisions of subsection A of this section, bears may be hunted from the first Saturday in October through the first Saturday in January, both dates inclusive, within the incorporated limits of any town or city that allows bear hunting.

[C. Amendments made to this regulation effective August 1, 2025 shall be in effect only through the 2026-2027 bear hunting season.]

**Staff Final Recommendation – Proposals include amendments recommended on March 19th by the Wildlife and Boat Committee as well as those amendments recommended by staff. Prior to adoption of the amendments, staff recommends the following modifications: 1) Remove the 3-day early firearms season from the counties of Bland, Craig, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski, Roanoke, Smyth, Tazewell, and Wythe. Due to continued concerns**

**about impacts of mange, along with data indicating that these populations are at or near their desired population objective, staff believe it is appropriate to remove this early season in advance of any additive mortality mange may cause in this area. 2) Include language ensuring that season reductions made during this regulation review and amendment process are temporary and will be reassessed during the next wildlife regulation review and amendment process utilizing updated bear population data and disease impacts. The intent will be to restore as much of the lost hunting opportunities as possible as conditions allow.**

**Rationale:**

(i) This proposal addresses population objectives from the 2023-2032 Bear Management Plan which call for stabilizing populations (at 2020 levels) for the 24 counties (Zones 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10) outlined in this proposal. Recent analyses for these zones indicate bear population declines likely due to multiple factors, including mortality from sarcoptic mange, high female harvest levels intended to reduce populations, poor mast production over the last decade, and increasing bear-vehicle collisions. Reducing female bear harvest, the primary tool within DWR's control, will be critical for stopping and reversing these declines.

Harvest data, conflict reports, sarcoptic mange reports, partner agency data, and constituent observations suggest that bear populations in Zones 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10 have declined significantly in recent years. The impacts of multiple factors noted above are currently being studied through a large-scale research project with Virginia Tech. While sarcoptic mange has not been documented in other states to cause bear population impacts, the magnitude of cases and severity, coupled with additional mortality factors, appears to be causing at least localized population declines in severely impacted zones. Sarcoptic mange has been present in Zones 5 and 9 (Frederick, Warren, Madison, Page, Rappahannock) since 2017 or before and has spread to surrounding areas, with high numbers of reports in zones 4 and 8 (Botetourt, Rockbridge, Augusta, Nelson) in recent years. While sarcoptic mange mortality rates are unknown currently in Virginia, approximately 30% of all mange reports result in the death of the reported bear due to extremely poor condition and/or secondary complications.

Research is ongoing across the eastern United States to learn more about sarcoptic mange, both the disease itself and the impacts on species such as bears. Currently, there are no effective treatments or preventative measures that can be used safely and effectively on wildlife. Thus, while reducing mange mortality is difficult, reducing female harvest mortality through regulation amendments is a step in combating the current population declines. Female productivity (reproductive rates) is likely impacted for multiple years following a mange infestation due to poor body condition and lack of sufficient resources to successfully raise cubs. While direct impacts of mange (death of the bear) are important, indirect impacts such as reproduction potential are also important for population recovery.

The timing of harvest seasons impact female bear harvest rates. Earlier seasons typically result in higher female harvests since sows are still on the landscape in

search of food prior to denning. Later seasons (mid-December onward) generally result in lower female harvests as those bears will enter a den either to produce cubs or to conserve resources during winter. While archery and muzzleloader seasons harvest a high percentage of females (5-year average of 42.4%), the firearms season harvests the highest number of females (5-year average of 49.6%) due to the popularity of this season. Hence, while all three seasons are proposed for reductions (see also 4VAC15-50-70 and 4VAC15-50-71), this firearms season reduction proposal is relatively significant to account for the higher harvest rates during this season.

These three season proposals are collectively intended to reduce sow mortality by 50-75% across all bear seasons and within each of the primary season opportunities: archery, muzzleloader, firearms without dogs, and firearms with dogs. Such reductions are necessary at this time because (1) declines in bear populations in these zones are expected to continue without a change in management strategy, and (2) mortality rates from sarcoptic mange are unknown until results from ongoing research are obtained. These proposals retain diverse forms of bear hunting recreation and allocate harvests as equitably as possible, in accordance with the 2023-2032 Bear Management Plan. Once monitoring reveals that populations have reached adequate recovery levels, DWR intends to re-instate harvest seasons as soon as possible thereafter.

To continue providing as much recreational opportunity as possible during reduced harvest seasons, hunters will still be able to chase bears with dogs in these zones, concurrent with the regular open season dates that have allowed the use of hounds. This provision, to be accomplished via a modification to 4VAC15-50-120, will help alleviate shifts in hunting pressure to adjoining counties where bear seasons are not being reduced while also limiting potential user conflicts of users in new areas, particularly those with limited public land access. The ability for hunters to continue chasing bears during this time may also assist the Department in monitoring incidents of sarcoptic mange and bear status in these reduced harvest zones.

(ii & iii) Charlotte, Halifax, Mecklenburg, and Prince Edward – This proposal from the Wildlife & Boat Committee would provide more opportunity to harvest bears with firearms during the concurrent deer firearms season.

Montgomery, Pulaski, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe – The proposal from the Wildlife & Boat Committee would provide consistent bear firearms hunting seasons across the entirety of these counties. Currently, the portion of these counties lying on the north/west side of Interstate 81 have longer bear firearms hunting seasons than the portion of the county lying south/east of Interstate 81.

**4 VAC 15-50-70**

**Game: Bear: Archery hunting.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) remove 14 days from the bear archery season in 24 counties, primarily located in the northwestern portion of the state where sarcoptic mange is endemic and (ii) clarify language regarding the "carry" of firearms during the archery season for bear to ensure consistency with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-50-70. Archery hunting.**

A. It shall be lawful to hunt bear during the special archery season with archery equipment from the first Saturday in October through the Friday prior to the third Monday in November, both dates inclusive, except in the localities listed in subsection B.

B. It shall be lawful to hunt bear during the special archery season with archery equipment from the third Saturday in October through the Friday prior to the third Monday in November, both dates inclusive, in the following counties, including the cities and towns within: Albemarle, Alleghany, Amherst, Appomattox, Augusta, Bath, Bedford, Botetourt, Buckingham, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Frederick, Greene, Highland, Loudoun, Madison, Nelson, Page, Rappahannock, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren.

~~B~~C. It shall be unlawful to ~~carry~~ use firearms to hunt any game species while hunting with archery equipment during the special archery seasons, except that hunters 15 years of age and under and apprentice hunters may ~~be in possession of~~ use firearms to hunt for bear while hunting on youth and apprentice hunter bear hunting weekend as authorized by 4VAC15-50-12 and except that a muzzleloading gun, as defined in 4VAC15-50-71, may be ~~in the possession of~~ used by a properly licensed muzzleloading gun hunter when and where the early special archery bear season overlaps the early special muzzleloading bear season.

~~C~~D. It shall be unlawful to use dogs when hunting with archery equipment during the special archery season, except that hounds may be used by hunters participating in the youth and apprentice hunter bear hunting weekend in areas as defined in 4VAC15-50-12, and that tracking dogs as described in § 29.1-516.1 of the Code of Virginia may be used.

[E. Amendments made to this regulation effective August 1, 2025 shall be in effect only through the 2026-2027 bear hunting season.]

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed with the following modifications: Include language ensuring that season reductions made during this regulation review and amendment process are temporary and will be reassessed during the next wildlife regulation review and amendment process utilizing updated bear population data and disease impacts. The intent will be to restore as much of the lost hunting opportunities as possible as conditions allow.**

**Rationale:**

(i) To address significant bear population declines in Zones 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10, bear archery, muzzleloader, and firearms (open) seasons are proposed for reduction. This proposed season package will retain diverse forms of bear hunting recreation and allocate harvests as equitably as possible, in accordance with the 2023-2032 Bear Management Plan. For more details, please refer to the rationale provided under the bear open season regulation proposal (4VAC15-50-11).

(ii) It is well established through historical application and case law that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution provides for the right to keep and bear arms and that this right shall not be infringed. While the right to keep and bear arms isn't unlimited and there are certain circumstances and situations where such right is restricted, these restrictions apply to background checks, felony convictions, and possession in sensitive locations. As recent case law continues to clarify that such restrictions don't apply to department-owned and managed lands or hunting situations, Department staffs have reviewed relevant regulations to ensure the consistency of these regulations with an individual's right under the Second Amendment. While an individual's rights under Second Amendment may permit possession of a firearm in many circumstances, the right to such possession doesn't authorize the use of a firearm for hunting. Lawful use of firearms for hunting remains controlled by applicable laws and regulations.

**4 VAC 15-50-71**

**Game: Bear: Muzzleloading gun hunting.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) remove 3 days from the bear muzzleloader season in 24 counties, primarily located in the northwestern portion of the state where sarcoptic mange is endemic, (ii) update the definitions of muzzleloading rifles and revolvers to better reflect the muzzleloading firearms applicable to the muzzleloading season, and (iii) clarify language regarding the "carry" of firearms during the muzzleloading season for bear to ensure consistency with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-50-71. Muzzleloading gun hunting.**

A. It shall be lawful to hunt bears during the special muzzleloading season with muzzleloading guns from the Saturday prior to the second Monday in November through the Friday prior to the third Monday in November, both dates inclusive, except in the Cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach, except in the localities listed in subsection B.

B. It shall be lawful to hunt bear during the special muzzleloading season with muzzleloading guns from the Tuesday following the second Monday in November through the Friday prior to the third Monday in November, both dates inclusive, in the following counties, including the cities and towns within: Albemarle, Alleghany, Amherst, Appomattox, Augusta, Bath, Bedford, Botetourt, Buckingham, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Frederick, Greene, Highland, Loudoun, Madison, Nelson, Page, Rappahannock, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren.

~~B~~C. It shall be unlawful to hunt bear with dogs during any special season for hunting with muzzleloading guns, except that tracking dogs as defined in § 29.1-516.1 of the Code of Virginia may be used.

~~C~~D. Muzzleloading guns, for the purpose of this section, include:

1. ~~Single shot muzzleloading~~ Muzzleloading rifles (one or more barrels) .40 caliber or larger, firing a single projectile or sabot (with a .35 caliber or larger projectile) where the projectile is loaded from the muzzle;

2. Muzzleloading shotguns (one or more barrels) not larger than 10 gauge where the projectiles are loaded from the muzzle;

3. Muzzleloading pistols (one or more barrels) .~~45~~.44 caliber or larger, firing a single projectile or sabot (with a .35 caliber or larger projectile) per barrel where the propellant and projectile are loaded from the muzzle; and

4. Muzzleloading revolvers .45 caliber or larger, firing a single projectile or sabot (with a .35 caliber or larger projectile) per cylinder where the propellant and projectile are loaded from the forward end of the cylinder.

~~D~~E. It shall be unlawful to ~~have in immediate possession~~ hunt bear with any firearm other than a muzzleloading gun ~~while hunting with a muzzleloading gun in a~~ during the special muzzleloading bear season.

[F. Amendments made to this regulation effective August 1, 2025 shall be in effect only through the 2026-2027 bear hunting season.]

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed with the following modifications: Include language ensuring that season reductions made during this regulation review and amendment process are temporary and will be reassessed during the next wildlife regulation review and amendment process utilizing updated bear population data and disease impacts. The intent will be to restore as much of the lost hunting opportunities as possible as conditions allow.**

**Rationale:**

(i) To address significant bear population declines in Zones 4, 5, 8, 9, and 10, bear archery, muzzleloader, and firearms (open) seasons are proposed for reduction. This proposed season package will retain diverse forms of bear hunting recreation and allocate harvests as equitably as possible, in accordance with the 2023-2032 Bear Management Plan. For more details, please refer to the rationale provided under the bear open season regulation proposal (4VAC15-50-11).

(ii) The current regulation language indicates that muzzleloading rifles must be a single shot weapon. However, double barrel muzzleloading rifles are manufactured, and it isn't the Department's intent to preclude double barreled muzzleloaders from being used during the special muzzleloading season. Further, muzzleloading revolvers shooting a .45 caliber projectile are routinely sold as .44 caliber muzzleloading revolvers, causing confusion regarding whether a .44 caliber muzzleloading revolver meets the regulatory requirement for use during the special muzzleloader season. The proposal will bring the regulation language in line with the department's intent of allowing double barreled muzzleloading rifles to be used during and clarifying that a .44 caliber muzzleloading revolver is a legal weapon for the special muzzleloading season.

(iii) It is well established through historical application and case law that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution provides for the right to keep and bear arms and that this right shall not be infringed. While the right to keep and bear arms isn't unlimited and there are certain circumstances and situations where such right is restricted, these restrictions apply to background checks, felony convictions, and possession in sensitive locations. As recent case law continues to clarify that such restrictions don't apply to department-owned and managed lands or hunting situations, Department staffs have reviewed relevant regulations to ensure the consistency of these regulations with an individual's right under the Second Amendment. While an individual's rights under Second Amendment may permit possession of a firearm in many circumstances, the right to such possession doesn't

authorize the use of a firearm for hunting. Lawful use of firearms for hunting remains controlled by applicable laws and regulations.

**4 VAC 15-50-120**

**Game: Bear: Bear hound training season.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) provide the opportunity to chase bears with dogs, without harvesting, during 18 days of the bear open season that has been removed in 23 counties, primarily located in the northwestern portion of the state where sarcoptic mange is endemic; (ii) ensure that dates for training season in Appomattox and Buckingham counties do not conflict with proposed changes for the open season; and (iii) clarify language regarding the "carry" of firearms during the bear hound training season to ensure consistency with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4 VAC 15-50-120. Bear hound training season.**

A. It shall be lawful to chase black bear with dogs, without capturing or taking, from August 1 through the last Saturday in September, both dates inclusive, in the Counties of Albemarle, Alleghany, Amherst, Augusta, Bath, Bedford, Bland, Botetourt, Brunswick, Buchanan, Carroll, Charlotte, Craig, Culpeper, Dickenson, Floyd, Franklin, Giles, Grayson (east of Route 16), Greene, Greensville, Highland, Lee, Lunenburg, Madison, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Nelson, Page, Pulaski, Rappahannock, Roanoke (west of I-81), Rockbridge, Rockingham, Russell, Scott, Shenandoah, Smyth (except for the part southeast of I-81 and west of State Route 16), Tazewell, Warren, Washington (northwest of I-81), Wise, and Wythe and in the Cities of Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach.

B. It shall be lawful to chase black bear with dogs, without capturing or taking, from the Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 14 days following, both dates inclusive, in the Counties of Amelia, ~~Appomattox, Buckingham,~~ Brunswick, Campbell (east of the Norfolk Southern Railroad), Charles City, [~~Charlotte~~], Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Essex, Gloucester, Greensville, [~~Halifax~~], Isle of Wight, James City, King and Queen, King George, King William, Lancaster, Lunenburg, Mathews, [~~Mecklenburg~~], Middlesex, New Kent, Northumberland, Nottoway, Pittsylvania (east of the Norfolk Southern Railroad), [~~Prince Edward~~], Prince George, Richmond, Southampton, Surry, Sussex, Westmoreland, and York.

C. It shall be lawful to chase black bear with dogs, without capturing or taking from the Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 12 days following, both dates inclusive, in the counties of Appomattox and Buckingham.

[D. It shall be lawful to chase black bear with dogs, without capturing or taking, from the Saturday prior to the third Monday in November and for 8 days following, both dates inclusive, in the Counties of Charlotte, Halifax, Mecklenburg, and Prince Edward.]

[~~D.~~E.] It shall be lawful to chase black bear with dogs, without capturing or taking, from the first Monday of December and for 19 days following, excluding Sundays, in the counties of Albemarle, Alleghany, Amherst, Appomattox, Augusta, Bath, Bedford, Botetourt, Buckingham,

Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Frederick, Greene, Highland, Madison, Nelson, Page, Rappahannock, Rockbridge, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren.

[~~C.~~E.~~F.~~] It shall be unlawful to ~~have in possession a~~ use for the purpose of taking a bear any firearm, bow, crossbow, or any weapon capable of taking a black bear while participating in the bear hound training season. ~~The meaning of "possession" for the purpose of this section shall include having a firearm, bow, crossbow, or any weapon capable of taking a black bear in or on one's person, vehicle, or conveyance.~~

**Staff Final Recommendation – Prior to adoption of the amendments, staff recommends the following modifications: Remove seven days of the November/December bear hound training season in Charlotte, Halifax, Mecklenburg, and Prince Edward counties. The Wildlife and Boat Committee desired to provide an additional week of firearms bear hunting opportunity in these counties which overlaps the last seven days of the current November/December bear hound training season currently available in this area. Removing the overlap between the bear hound training season and firearms bear hunting season, during which use of hounds is legal, will eliminate potential confusion regarding differing laws which govern the bear hound training seasons and firearms bear hunting seasons.**

**Rationale:**

(i) Amendments to the open bear season regulation (4VAC15-50-11) resulted in the removal of 25 bear firearms hunting days in certain areas. On 18 of those days removed, hounds could be used to hunt bear in 23 counties. To continue providing as much recreational opportunity as possible during the reduced firearms season without impacting bear populations, this proposal will enable hunters to chase bears with hounds, without harvesting them, in these counties, concurrent with the regular open season dates that have allowed the use of hounds. These proposals will also help alleviate shifts in hunting pressure to adjoining counties where bear seasons are not being reduced while also limiting potential user conflicts of users in new areas, particularly those with limited public land access. The ability for hunters to continue chasing bears during this time may also assist the Department in monitoring incidents of sarcoptic mange and bear status in these reduced harvest zones.

(ii) For consistency in seasons across mange affected zones, the open season proposal (4VAC15-50-11) will provide three additional days of firearms bear season in Appomattox and Buckingham counties, the last two of which will allow the use of dogs. Therefore, a modification of subsections B and C is necessary so that the chase regulation is not counter to the open season regulation on those two days that overlap.

(iii) It is well established through historical application and case law that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution provides for the right to keep and bear arms and that this right shall not be infringed. While the right to keep and bear arms isn't unlimited and there are certain circumstances and situations where such right is restricted, these restrictions apply to background checks, felony convictions, and possession in

sensitive locations. As recent case law continues to clarify that such restrictions don't apply to department-owned and managed lands or hunting situations, Department staffs have reviewed relevant regulations to ensure the consistency of these regulations with an individual's right under the Second Amendment. While an individual's rights under Second Amendment may permit possession of a firearm in many circumstances, the right to such possession doesn't authorize the use of a firearm for hunting. Lawful use of firearms for hunting remains controlled by applicable laws and regulations.

# General Regulations

**4VAC 15-20-50**

**Department of Wildlife Resources: Definitions and Miscellaneous: In General: Definitions; "wild animal," "native animal," "naturalized animal," "nonnative (exotic) animal," and "domestic animal".**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to eliminate the requirement that a written declaration for the possession of domesticated red foxes with a coat color distinguishable from wild red foxes and wild European rabbits be renewed every 5 years.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-20-50. Definitions; "wild animal," "native animal," "naturalized animal," "nonnative (exotic) animal," and "domestic animal".**

A. In accordance with § 29.1-100 of the Code of Virginia, the following terms shall have the meanings ascribed to them by this section when used in regulations of the board:

"Native animal" means those species and subspecies of animals naturally occurring in Virginia, as included in the department's 2024 "List of Native and Naturalized Fauna of Virginia," with copies available in the headquarters and regional offices of the department.

"Naturalized animal" means those species and subspecies of animals not originally native to Virginia that have established wild, self-sustaining populations, as included in the department's 2024 "List of Native and Naturalized Fauna of Virginia," with copies available in the headquarters and regional offices of the department.

"Nonnative (exotic) animal" means those species and subspecies of animals not naturally occurring in Virginia, excluding domestic and naturalized species.

The following animals are defined as domestic animals:

Domestic dog (Canis familiaris), including wolf hybrids.

Domestic cat (Felis catus), including hybrids with wild felines.

Domestic horse (Equus caballus), including hybrids with Equus asinus.

Domestic ass, burro, and donkey (Equus asinus).

Domestic cattle (Bos taurus and Bos indicus).

Domestic sheep (Ovis aries), including hybrids with wild sheep.

Domestic goat (Capra hircus).

Domestic swine (Sus scrofa), including pot-bellied pig and excluding any swine that are wild or for which no claim of ownership can be made.

Llama (Lama glama).

Alpaca (Lama pacos).

Camels (Camelus bactrianus and Camelus dromedarius).

Domesticated races of hamsters (Mesocricetus spp.).

Domesticated races of mink (Mustela vison) where adults are heavier than 1.15 kilograms or their coat color can be distinguished from wild mink.

Domesticated races of guinea pigs (Cavia porcellus).

Domesticated races of gerbils (Meriones unguiculatus).

Domesticated races of chinchillas (Chinchilla laniger).

Domesticated races of rats (Rattus norvegicus and Rattus rattus).

Domesticated races of mice (Mus musculus).

Domesticated breeds of European rabbit (Oryctolagus cuniculus) recognized by the American Rabbit Breeders Association, Inc. and any lineage resulting from crossbreeding recognized breeds. A list of recognized rabbit breeds is available on the department's website.

Domesticated races of chickens (Gallus).

Domesticated races of turkeys (Meleagris gallopavo).

Domesticated races of ducks and geese distinguishable morphologically from wild birds.

Feral pigeons (Columba domestica and Columba livia) and domesticated races of pigeons.

Domesticated races of guinea fowl (Numida meleagris).

Domesticated races of peafowl (Pavo cristatus).

Domesticated morphs of red cornsnake (Pantherophis guttatus) visibly distinguishable from native red cornsnakes based on their unique colors and patterns.

"Wild animal" means any member of the animal kingdom, except domestic animals, including any native, naturalized, or nonnative (exotic) mammal, fish, bird, amphibian, reptile, mollusk, crustacean, arthropod, or other invertebrate and any hybrid of these animals, except as otherwise specified in regulations of the board, or part, product, egg, or offspring of them, or the dead body or parts thereof.

B. Exception for red foxes and European rabbits. Domesticated red foxes (Vulpes vulpes) having coat colors distinguishable from wild red foxes and wild European rabbits possessed in captivity on July 1, 2017, may be maintained in captivity until the animal dies, but the animal may not be bred or sold without a permit from the department. Persons possessing domesticated red foxes or European rabbits without a permit from the department must declare such possession in writing to the department by January 1, 2018. This written declaration must include the number of individual animals in possession and date acquired, sex, estimated age, coloration, and a photograph of each fox or European rabbit. This written declaration (i) shall serve as a permit for possession only~~,~~ and (ii) is not transferable~~, and (iii) must be renewed every five years~~.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

The requirement to renew the permit for domestic red foxes and European rabbits will be unnecessary in 2028 as the foxes will be nearing the expected life span at that time and no rabbits were permitted. The removal of the renewal requirement will benefit both the permittees and the Department by saving time, communications, and paperwork.

This regulation required for all persons possessing domesticated red foxes or European rabbits in captivity on July 1, 2017, to declare such possession in writing to the Department by January 1, 2018, to obtain a permit for the animal. The domestic foxes and rabbits were to be maintained in captivity until the animal dies, but the animals could not be bred or sold without a permit from the Department. A total of 37 domestic red foxes and no European rabbits were permitted as of January 1, 2018. After one permit renewal period, the number of permitted captive foxes had decreased substantially as many foxes had passed. The next renewal period will be in 2028, when the captive foxes will be at a minimum of ten and a half years old. Red foxes live roughly 12 years in captivity. After discussions with the Permits Office, it was deemed unnecessary to renew the permit again with all the captive foxes nearing or passing the expected life span. The removal of the requirement to renew the permit every 5 years will allow those with captive red foxes to maintain their permit until the animal passes without the unnecessary renewal paperwork and communications from the Department.

**4VAC15-20-65**

**Definitions and Miscellaneous: In General: Hunting, trapping, and fishing license and permit fees**

## Summary:

The proposal is to (i) create a three-day trip hunting license for Virginia residents as authorized in §29.1-303.1, and (ii) include the elk hunt lottery application fee for residents and nonresidents in the fee table.

## Proposed language of amendment:

### 4VAC15-20-65. Hunting, trapping, and fishing license and permit fees.

In accordance with the authority of the board under subdivision 16 of § 29.1-103 of the Code of Virginia, the following fees are established for hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses and permits:

Virginia Resident Licenses to Hunt

| Type license | Fee |
|---|---|
| One-year Resident License to Hunt, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $22.00 |
| Two-year Resident License to Hunt, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $43.00 |
| Three-year Resident License to Hunt, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $64.00 |
| Four-year Resident License to Hunt, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $85.00 |
| Resident Three-Day Trip License to Hunt | $11.00 |
| County or City Resident License to Hunt in County or City of Residence Only, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $15.00 |
| Resident Senior Citizen Annual License to Hunt, for licensees 65 years of age or older | $8.00 |
| Resident Junior License to Hunt, for licensees 12 through 15 years of age, optional for licensees younger than 12 years of age | $7.50 |
| Resident Youth Combination License to Hunt, and to hunt bear, deer, and turkey, to hunt with archery equipment during archery hunting season, and to hunt with muzzleloading guns during muzzleloading hunting season, for licensees younger than 16 years of age | $15.00 |
| Resident Sportsman License to Hunt and Freshwater Fish, and to hunt bear, deer, and turkey, to hunt with archery equipment during archery hunting season, to hunt with muzzleloading guns during muzzleloading hunting season, to fish in designated stocked trout waters (also listed under Virginia Resident Licenses to Fish) | $99.00 |
| Resident Hunting License for Partially Disabled Veterans | $11.00 |
| Resident Infant Lifetime License to Hunt | $130.00 |
| Resident Junior Lifetime License to Hunt, for licensees younger than 12 years of age at the time of purchase | $260.00 |
| Resident Lifetime License to Hunt, for licensees at the time of purchase: | |

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|---|---|
| through 44 years of age | $265.00 |
| 45 through 50 years of age | $215.00 |
| 51 through 55 years of age | $165.00 |
| 56 through 60 years of age | $115.00 |
| 61 through 64 years of age | $65.00 |
| 65 years of age and older | $25.00 |
| Totally and Permanently Disabled Resident Special Lifetime License to Hunt | $15.00 |
| Service-Connected Totally and Permanently Disabled Veteran Resident Lifetime License to Hunt or Freshwater Fish (also listed under Virginia Resident Licenses to Fish) | no fee |

Virginia Resident Licenses for Additional Hunting Privileges

| Type license or permit | Fee |
|---|---|
| Resident Deer and Turkey Hunting License, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $22.00 |
| Resident Junior Deer and Turkey Hunting License, for licensees younger than 16 years of age | $7.50 |
| Resident Archery License to Hunt with archery equipment during archery hunting season | $17.00 |
| Resident Bear Hunting License | $20.00 |
| Resident Muzzleloading License to Hunt during muzzleloading hunting season | $17.00 |
| Resident Bonus Deer Permit | $17.00 |
| Resident Fox Hunting License to hunt foxes on horseback with hounds without firearms (not required of an individual holding a general License to Hunt) | $22.00 |
| Resident Elk Hunt Lottery Application | $15.00 |
| Resident Special Elk Hunting License (not required outside of the Elk Management Zone and only awarded to individuals through a department elk license program) | $40.00 |

Virginia Nonresident Licenses to Hunt

| Type license | Fee |
|---|---|
| Nonresident License to Hunt, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $110.00 |
| Nonresident Three-Day Trip License to Hunt | $59.00 |
| Nonresident Youth License to Hunt, for licensees: | |
| younger than 12 years of age | $12.00 |
| 12 through 15 years of age | $15.00 |

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|---|---|
| Nonresident Youth Combination License to Hunt, and to hunt bear, deer, and turkey, to hunt with archery equipment during archery hunting season, and to hunt with muzzleloading guns during muzzleloading hunting season, for licensees younger than 16 years of age | $30.00 |
| Nonresident Annual Hunting License for Partially Disabled Veterans | $55.00 |
| Nonresident Annual Hunting License for Totally and Permanently Disabled Veterans | $27.50 |
| Nonresident Infant Lifetime License to Hunt | $275.00 |
| Nonresident Lifetime License to Hunt | $580.00 |

Virginia Nonresident Licenses for Additional Hunting Privileges

| Type license or permit | Fee |
|---|---|
| Nonresident Deer and Turkey Hunting License, for licensees: | |
| 16 years of age or older | $85.00 |
| 12 through 15 years of age | $15.00 |
| younger than 12 years of age | $12.00 |
| Nonresident Bear Hunting License | $150.00 |
| Nonresident Archery License to Hunt with archery equipment during archery hunting season | $30.00 |
| Nonresident Muzzleloading License to Hunt during muzzleloading hunting season | $30.00 |
| Nonresident Shooting Preserve License to Hunt within the boundaries of a licensed shooting preserve | $22.00 |
| Nonresident Bonus Deer Permit | $30.00 |
| Nonresident Fox Hunting License to hunt foxes on horseback with hounds without firearms (not required of an individual holding a general License to Hunt) | $110.00 |
| Nonresident Elk Hunt Lottery Application | $20.00 |
| Nonresident Special Elk Hunting License (not required outside of the Elk Management Zone and only awarded to individuals through a department elk license program) | $400.00 |

Miscellaneous Licenses or Permits to Hunt

| Type license or permit | Fee |
|---|---|
| Waterfowl Hunting Stationary Blind in Public Waters License | $22.50 |
| Waterfowl Hunting Floating Blind in Public Waters License | $40.00 |
| Foxhound Training Preserve License | $17.00 |

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| Public Access Lands for Sportsmen Permit to Hunt, Trap, or Fish on Designated Lands (also listed under Miscellaneous Licenses or Permits to Fish) | $17.00 |

Virginia Resident and Nonresident Licenses to Trap

| Type license | Fee |
|---|---|
| One-year Resident License to Trap, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $45.00 |
| Two-year Resident License to Trap, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $89.00 |
| Three-year Resident License to Trap, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $133.00 |
| Four-year Resident License to Trap, for licensees 16 years of age or older | $177.00 |
| County or City Resident License to Trap in County or City of Residence Only | $20.00 |
| Resident Junior License to Trap, for licensees younger than 16 years of age | $10.00 |
| Resident Senior Citizen License to Trap, for licensees 65 years of age or older | $8.00 |
| Resident Senior Citizen Lifetime License to Trap, for licensees 65 years of age or older | $25.00 |
| Totally and Permanently Disabled Resident Special Lifetime License to Trap | $15.00 |
| Service-Connected Totally and Permanently Disabled Veteran Resident Lifetime License to Trap | $15.00 |
| Nonresident License to Trap | $205.00 |

Virginia Resident Licenses to Fish

| Type license | Fee |
|---|---|
| One-year Resident License to Freshwater Fish | $22.00 |
| Two-year Resident License to Freshwater Fish | $43.00 |
| Three-year Resident License to Freshwater Fish | $64.00 |
| Four-year Resident License to Freshwater Fish | $85.00 |
| County or City Resident License to Freshwater Fish in County or City of Residence Only | $15.00 |
| Resident License to Freshwater Fish, for licensees 65 years of age or older | $8.00 |
| Resident License to Fish in Designated Stocked Trout Waters | $22.00 |
| Resident License to Freshwater and Saltwater Fish | $38.50 |
| Resident License to Freshwater Fish for Five Consecutive Days | $13.00 |
| Resident License to Freshwater and Saltwater Fish for Five Consecutive Days | $23.00 |
| Resident Sportsman License to Hunt and Freshwater Fish, and to hunt bear, deer, and turkey, to hunt with archery equipment during archery hunting season, to hunt with muzzleloading guns | $99.00 |

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|---|---|
| during muzzleloading hunting season, to fish in designated stocked trout waters (also listed under Virginia Resident Licenses to Hunt) | |
| Resident Fishing License for Partially Disabled Veterans | $11.00 |
| Resident Infant Lifetime License to Fish | $130.00 |
| Resident Special Lifetime License to Freshwater Fish, for licensees at the time of purchase: | |
| through 44 years of age | $265.00 |
| 45 through 50 years of age | $215.00 |
| 51 through 55 years of age | $165.00 |
| 56 through 60 years of age | $115.00 |
| 61 through 64 years of age | $65.00 |
| 65 years of age and older | $25.00 |
| Resident Special Lifetime License to Fish in Designated Stocked Trout Waters, for licensees at the time of purchase: | |
| through 44 years of age | $265.00 |
| 45 through 50 years of age | $215.00 |
| 51 through 55 years of age | $165.00 |
| 56 through 60 years of age | $115.00 |
| 61 through 64 years of age | $65.00 |
| 65 years of age and older | $25.00 |
| Totally and Permanently Disabled Resident Special Lifetime License to Freshwater Fish | $15.00 |
| Service-Connected Totally and Permanently Disabled Veteran Resident Lifetime License to Hunt and Freshwater Fish (also listed under Virginia Resident Licenses to Hunt) | no fee |

Virginia Nonresident Licenses to Fish

| Type license | Fee |
|---|---|
| Nonresident License to Freshwater Fish | $46.00 |
| Nonresident License to Freshwater Fish in Designated Stocked Trout Waters | $22.00 |
| Nonresident License to Freshwater and Saltwater Fish | $70.00 |
| Nonresident Fishing License for Partially Disabled Veterans | $23.00 |
| Nonresident Annual Fishing License for Totally and Permanently Disabled Veterans | $11.50 |
| Nonresident License to Freshwater Fish for One Day | $7.00 |

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|---|---|
| Nonresident License to Freshwater Fish for Five Consecutive Days | $20.00 |
| Nonresident License to Freshwater and Saltwater Fish for Five Consecutive Days | $30.00 |
| Nonresident Infant Lifetime License to Fish | $275.00 |
| Nonresident Special Lifetime License to Freshwater Fish | $580.00 |
| Nonresident Special Lifetime License to in Fish in Designated Stocked Trout Waters | $580.00 |

Miscellaneous Licenses or Permits to Fish

| Type license or permit | Fee |
|---|---|
| Permit to Fish for One Day at Board-Designated Stocked Trout Fishing Areas with Daily Use Fees | $7.00 |
| Public Access Lands for Sportsmen Permit to Hunt, Trap, or Fish on Designated Lands (also listed under Miscellaneous Licenses or Permits to Hunt) | $17.00 |
| Special Guest Fishing License | $60.00 |

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

(i) During the 2019 session, the General Assembly passed, and the Governor enacted HB1621 which authorizes the Department to create a trip hunting license for Virginia residents. Prior to passage of this legislation, the Department was only authorized to provide a trip hunting license for nonresidents. To date, the Department has not acted upon its authority to establish a trip hunting license for Virginia residents, but affording residents the opportunity to purchase a three-day trip license may encourage an alternative entry point for individuals to learn how to hunt and afford additional individuals the opportunity to pursue hunting activities within Virginia.

(ii) During the 2020 session, the General Assembly passed, and the Governor enacted HB388/SB262 authorizing the Department to create a special elk hunting license. This legislation also authorized the Department to establish quotas or procedures for selection to purchase a special elk hunting license which has become the Department's elk hunt lottery. Following passage of this legislation, fees for the special elk hunting licenses were included in regulation, but fees for the elk hunt lottery were not. This proposal would establish the elk hunt lottery fees in regulation like all other licenses, permit, stamp, etc. fees for hunting, freshwater fishing, and trapping in Virginia.

**4VAC15-20-130**

**Definitions and Miscellaneous: In General: Endangered and threatened species; adoption of federal list; additional species enumerated**

**Summary:** The proposal is to designate an Eastern Tiger Salamander Experimental Population on certain lands in Sussex County.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

## 4VAC15-20-130. Endangered and threatened species; adoption of federal list; additional species enumerated

A. The board hereby adopts the Federal Endangered and Threatened Species List, Endangered Species Act of December 28, 1973 (16 USC §§ 1531-1543), as amended as of October 10, 2024, and declares all species listed thereon to be endangered or threatened species in the Commonwealth. Pursuant to subdivision 12 of § 29.1-103 of the Code of Virginia, the director is hereby delegated authority to propose adoption of modifications and amendments to the Federal Endangered and Threatened Species List in accordance with the procedures of §§ 29.1-501 and 29.1-502 of the Code of Virginia.

B. In addition to the provisions of subsection A of this section, the following species are declared endangered or threatened in the Commonwealth and are afforded the protection provided by Article 6 (§ 29.1-563 et seq.) of Chapter 5 of Title 29.1 of the Code of Virginia:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Fish: | |
| Endangered: | |
| Dace, Clinch | Chrosomus sp. cf. saylori |
| Dace, Tennessee | Phoxinus tennesseensis |
| Darter, sharphead | Etheostoma acuticeps |
| Darter, variegate | Etheostoma variatum |
| Sunfish, blackbanded | Enneacanthus chaetodon |
| Threatened: | |
| Darter, Carolina | Etheostoma collis |
| Darter, golden | Etheostoma denoncourti |
| Darter, greenfin | Etheostoma chlorobranchium |
| Darter, western sand | Ammocrypta clara |
| Madtom, orangefin | Noturus gilberti |
| Paddlefish | Polyodon spathula |
| Shiner, emerald | Notropis atherinoides |
| Shiner, steelcolor | Cyprinella whipplei |
| Shiner, whitemouth | Notropis alborus |
| 2. Amphibians: | |
| Endangered: | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Salamander, eastern tiger | Ambystoma tigrinum |
| Threatened: | |
| Salamander, Mabee's | Ambystoma mabeei |
| 3. Reptiles: | |
| Endangered: | |
| Rattlesnake, canebrake (Coastal Plain population of timber rattlesnake) | Crotalus horridus |
| Turtle, bog | Glyptemys muhlenbergii |
| Turtle, eastern chicken | Deirochelys reticularia |
| Threatened: | |
| Lizard, eastern glass | Ophisaurus ventralis |
| Turtle, wood | Glyptemys insculpta |
| 4. Birds: | |
| Endangered: | |
| Plover, Wilson's | Charadrius wilsonia |
| Rail, black | Laterallus jamaicensis |
| Woodpecker, red-cockaded | Dryobates borealis |
| Wren, Bewick's | Thryomanes bewickii |
| Threatened: | |
| Falcon, peregrine | Falco peregrinus |
| Shrike, loggerhead | Lanius ludovicianus |
| Sparrow, Bachman's | Aimophila aestivalis |
| Sparrow, Henslow's | Ammodramus henslowii |
| Tern, gull-billed | Sterna nilotica |
| 5. Mammals: | |
| Endangered: | |
| Bat, Rafinesque's eastern big-eared | Corynorhinus rafinesquii macrotis |
| Bat, little brown | Myotis lucifugus |
| Bat, tri-colored | Perimyotis subflavus |

| | |
|---|---|
| Hare, snowshoe | Lepus americanus |
| Shrew, American water | Sorex palustris |
| Vole, rock | Microtus chrotorrhinus |
| 6. Mollusks: | |
| Endangered: | |
| Coil, rubble | Helicodiscus lirellus |
| Coil, shaggy | Helicodiscus diadema |
| Deertoe | Truncilla truncata |
| Elephantear | Elliptio crassidens |
| Elimia, spider | Elimia arachnoidea |
| Floater, brook | Alasmidonta varicosa |
| Ghostsnail, thankless | Holsingeria unthanksensis |
| Heelsplitter, Tennessee | Lasmigona holstonia |
| Lilliput, purple | Toxolasma lividus |
| Mussel, slippershell | Alasmidonta viridis |
| Pigtoe, Ohio | Pleurobema cordatum |
| Pigtoe, pyramid | Pleurobema rubrum |
| Springsnail, Appalachian | Fontigens bottimeri |
| Springsnail (no common name) | Fontigens morrisoni |
| Supercoil, spirit | Paravitrea hera |
| Threatened: | |
| Floater, green | Lasmigona subviridis |
| Papershell, fragile | Leptodea fragilis |
| Pimpleback | Quadrula pustulosa |
| Pistolgrip | Tritogonia verrucosa |
| Riversnail, spiny | Iofluvialis |
| Sandshell, black | Ligumia recta |
| Supercoil, brown | Paravitrea septadens |
| 7. Arthropods: | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Threatened: | |
| Amphipod, Madison Cave | Stygobromus stegerorum |
| Pseudotremia, Ellett Valley | Pseudotremia cavernarum |
| Xystodesmid, Laurel Creek | Sigmoria whiteheadi |

C. It shall be unlawful to take, transport, process, sell, or offer for sale within the Commonwealth any threatened or endangered species of fish or wildlife except as authorized by law.

D. The incidental take of certain species may occur in certain circumstances and with the implementation of certain conservation practices as described in this subsection:

| Species | Location | Allowable Circumstances | Required Conservation Measures | Expected Incidental Take |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Little brown bat, Tri-colored bat | Statewide | Human health risk – need for removal of individual animals from human-habited structures. | Between May 15 and August 31, no exclusion of bats from maternity colonies, except for human health concerns.<br>Department-permitted nuisance wildlife control operator with department-recognized certification in techniques associated with removal of bats.<br>Use of exclusion devices that allow individual animals to escape.<br>Manual collection of individual animals incapable of sustaining themselves; transport to a willing and appropriately permitted wildlife rehabilitator. | Little to no direct lethal taking expected. |
| | | Public safety or property damage risk – need for tree removal, application of prescribed fire, or other land management actions affecting known roosts; | Hibernacula: no tree removal, use of prescribed fire, or other land management action within a 250-foot radius buffer area from December 1 through April 30. Between September 1 and November 30, increase the buffer to a 1/4-mile radius with the following conditions: for timber harvests greater than 20 acres, retain snags and wolf trees (if not presenting public safety or property risk) and small tree groups up to 15 trees of 3-inch diameter at breast height (dbh) or greater, one tree group per 20 acres. Otherwise, document the need (public safety, property damage risk) for tree removal during this period | |

| | |
|---|---|
| removal of animals from known roosts. | and verify that no known roost trees exist in the buffer area. Tree removal and prescribed fire are permitted outside of these dates.<br>Known roost trees: no tree removal, use of prescribed fire, or other land management action within a 150-foot radius buffer area from June 1 through July 31, if possible. Otherwise, document public safety or property damage risk.<br>Department-permitted nuisance wildlife control operator with department-recognized certification in techniques associated with removal of bats.<br>Use of exclusion devices that allow individual animals to escape.<br>Manual collection of individual animals incapable of sustaining themselves; transport to a willing and appropriately permitted wildlife rehabilitator. |

E. Experimental populations of certain species are described below, consistent with the identification of them in state conservation plans. These populations are geographically distinct from naturally occurring populations and not subject to the penalties and prohibitions authorized under §29.1-568.

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| Species | Designated Location of Experimental Population | County/City | Take Exemptions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eastern Tiger Salamander (Ambystoma tigrinum) | Lands located within the 2025 boundaries of the department's Big Wood Wildlife Management Area and The Nature Conservancy's Piney Grove Preserve | Sussex County | Take is authorized unless otherwise prohibited by other Virginia laws or regulations |

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

The Eastern Tiger Salamander is a state endangered species in threat of extirpation from Virginia's coastal plain. All three currently-known populations occur on unprotected private lands where land management actions may negatively impact the animals themselves or the habitat in which they live or in

an area experiencing substantial growth and urbanization. One of the conservation actions included within the approved DWR 2025 Eastern Tiger Salamander Conservation Plan is translocation of this species to other locations to establish new populations that increase overall resiliency, redundancy, and representation of the species on the landscape. The initially-identified experimental population would be established in appropriate habitat on the DWR's Big Woods Wildlife Management Area in Sussex County. To ensure this does not result in any additional regulatory burden to our citizens, staff recommends the Board designate an Eastern Tiger Salamander Experimental Population with the spatial extent to include lands within the borders of Big Woods WMA and The Nature Conservancy's Piney Grove Preserve. The inclusion of Piney Grove Preserve recognizes that, at the identified suitable habitat, the roaming range of this species (300 meters) may result in salamanders occurring on this property. The DWR has received the support of The Nature Conservancy and recognition that animals from this population may be found on that property. The DWR staffs have also met with the Sussex County Administrator and landowners around these properties and received support for this conservation action at this site. As the agency monitors the success of this action, it may update the Conservation Plan and recommend amendments to this regulation to designate additional areas of experimental populations.

**4VAC15-20-155**

**Definitions and Miscellaneous: In General: Camping on Wildlife Management Areas and other department-owned or department-managed lands**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to clarify locations where camping is allowed on Wildlife Management Areas and other department-owned and department-managed lands.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-20-155. Camping on Wildlife Management Areas and other department-owned or department-managed lands.**

Temporary dispersed camping, with no amenities provided, may only be performed on WMA's and other DWR-owned or managed lands when occupants are engaged in authorized activities and in strict compliance with established terms and conditions, including those listed below. Camping may be prohibited on certain portions or entire parcels of DWR-owned or managed lands, including certain WMA's.

A. Authorization. It shall be unlawful to camp without written authorization from the Department. Written authorization to camp is required in addition to any and all other licenses, permits or authorizations that may otherwise be required. Written authorization is obtained by completing and submitting a Camping Authorization Form. Only an individual 18 years of age or older, who is a member of and accepts responsibility for the camp and camping group, may be issued a camping authorization.

B. Camping periods. Unless otherwise posted or authorized, it shall be unlawful to camp for more than 14 consecutive nights, or more than 14 nights in a 28-day period on Department-owned or controlled lands. At the end of the authorized camping period, all personal property and any refuse must be removed.

C. Allowed and Prohibited locations. Back country camping is allowed. Adjacent to roadways, c~~C~~amping is allowed only in ~~at~~ previously cleared areas ~~and established sites.~~ No vegetation may be cut, damaged or removed to establish a camp site. Enclosed camping trailers or camping vehicles are allowed if they do not occupy all the available parking area in that location. It shall be unlawful to camp within 300 feet of any Department-owned lake, boat ramp or other facility. It shall be unlawful to camp at other specific locations as posted. This regulation shall not prohibit active angling at night along shorelines where permitted.

D. Removal of personal property and refuse. Any person who establishes or occupies a camp shall be responsible for the complete removal of all personal property and refuse when the camping authorization has expired. Any personal property or refuse that remains after the camping authorization has expired shall be considered litter and punishable pursuant to 33.2-802 of the Code of Virginia.

E. It shall be unlawful when camping on Department-owned or managed lands to store or leave unattended any food (including food for pets and livestock), refuse, bear attractant, or other wildlife attractant unless it is: (a) in a bear-resistant container; (b) in a trunk of a vehicle or in a closed, locked, hard-sided motor vehicle with a solid top; (c) in a closed, locked, hard-body trailer; or (d) suspended at least 10 feet clear of the ground at all points and at least 4 feet horizontally from the supporting tree or pole and any other tree or pole. It shall be unlawful to

discard, bury or abandon any food, refuse, bear attractant, or other wildlife attractant unless it is disposed of by placing it inside an animal-resistant trash receptacle provided by the Department.

F. Any violation of this regulation or other posted rules shall be punishable as a Class III Misdemeanor, and the camping permit shall become null and void, and the permittee shall be required to immediately vacate the property upon summons or notification. A second or subsequent offense may result in the loss of camping privileges on department-owned or managed properties.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

Since this regulation was established in 2021 there has been some confusion about where camping is allowed and whether back country camping is allowed. The intent of this amendment is to clarify that back country camping is allowed and that camping is allowed in existing open areas adjacent to roadways. Further, it is proposed to replace the words "and established sites" with "areas", because there are no formally designated camp sites on WMAs. Confusion also exists regarding the use of enclosed camping trailers and camping vehicles. The proposal is to clarify that these camping methods are allowed, if they do not occupy all the available parking area, which could restrict access for other WMA visitors.

**4VAC15-30-40**

**Definitions and Miscellaneous: Importation, Possession, Sale, etc., of Animals: Importation requirements, possession, and sale of nonnative (exotic) animals.**

**Summary:**

The proposals are to remove requirements for reporting of harvested northern snakehead fish and authorizations for allowing the possession of prairie dogs in certain circumstances.

**Proposed Language of Amendment:**

## 4VAC15-30-40. Importation requirements, possession, and sale of nonnative (exotic) animals.

A. Permit required. A special permit is required and may be issued by the department, if consistent with the department's fish and wildlife management program, to import, possess, or sell those nonnative (exotic) animals listed in the following table and in 4VAC15-20-210 that the board finds and declares to be predatory or undesirable within the meaning and intent of § 29.1-542 of the Code of Virginia, in that their introduction into the Commonwealth will be detrimental to the native fish and wildlife resources of Virginia.

| AMPHIBIANS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Order | Family | Genus/Species | Common Name |
| Anura | Bufonidae | Rhinella marina | Cane toad* |
| | | Hymenochirus spp. | |
| | | Pseudohymenochiris merlini | African dwarf frog |
| | Pipidae | Xenopus spp. | Tongueless or African clawed frog |
| Caudata | | All species, except | All mole salamanders, except |
| | Ambystomatidae | Ambystoma mexicanum | Mexican axolotl |
| **BIRDS** | | | |
| Order | Family | Genus/Species | Common Name |
| Psittaciformes | Psittacidae | Myiopsitta monachus | Monk parakeet* |
| Anseriformes | Anatidae | Cygnus olor | Mute swan |
| **FISH** | | | |
| Order | Family | Genus/Species | Common Name |
| Cypriniformes | Catostomidae | Catostomus microps | Modoc sucker |
| | | Catostomus santaanae | Santa Ana sucker |
| | | Catostomus warnerensis | Warner sucker |
| | | Ictiobus bubalus | Smallmouth* buffalo |
| | | I. cyprinellus | Bigmouth* buffalo |
| | | I. niger | Black buffalo* |
| | Characidae | Pygopristis spp. | Piranhas |
| | | Pygocentrus spp. | |
| | | Rooseveltiella spp. | |
| | | Serrasalmo spp. | |
| | | Serrasalmus spp. | |
| | | Taddyella spp. | |
| | Cobitidae | Misgurnus anguillicaudatus | Oriental weatherfish |
| | Cyprinidae | Aristichyhys nobilis | Bighead carp* |
| | | Chrosomus saylori | Laurel dace |
| | | Ctenopharyngodon idella | Grass carp or white amur |
| | | Cyprinella caerulea | Blue shiner |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Cyprinella formosa | Beautiful shiner |
| | | Cyprinella lutrensis | Red shiner |
| | | Hypophthalmichthys molitrix | Silver carp* |
| | | Mylopharyngodom piceus | Black carp* |
| | | Notropis albizonatus | Palezone shiner |
| | | Notropis cahabae | Cahaba shiner |
| | | Notropis girardi | Arkansas River shiner |
| | | Notropis mekistocholas | Cape Fear shiner |
| | | Notropis simus pecosensis | Pecos bluntnose shiner |
| | | Notropis topeka (= tristis) | Topeka shiner |
| | | Phoxinus cumberlandensis | Blackside dace |
| | | Rhinichthys osculus lethoporus | Independence Valley speckled dace |
| | | Rhinichthys osculus nevadensis | Ash Meadows speckled dace |
| | | Rhinichthys osculus oligoporus | Clover Valley speckled dace |
| | | Rhinichthys osculus ssp. | Foskett speckled dace |
| | | Rhinichthys osculus thermalis | Kendall Warm Springs dace |
| | | Scardinius erythrophthalmus | Rudd |
| | | Tinca tinca | Tench* |
| Cyprinodontiformes | Poeciliidae | Gambusia gaigei | Big Bend gambusia |
| | | Gambusia georgei | San Marcos gambusia |
| | | Gambusia heterochir | Clear Creek gambusia |
| | | Gambusia nobilis | Pecos gambusia |
| | | Peociliopsis occidentalis | Gila topminnow |
| Gasterosteiformes | Gasterosteidae | Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni | Unarmored threespine stickleback |
| Gobiesociformes | Gobiidae | Proterorhinus marmoratus | Tubenose goby |
| | | Neogobius melanostomus | Round goby |
| | Centrarchidae | Micropterus henshalli | Alabama bass |
| | Channidae | Channa spp. | Snakeheads |
| | | Parachanna spp. | |
| | Cichlidae | Tilapia spp. | Tilapia |
| | | Gymnocephalus cernuum | Ruffe* |
| | Elassomatidae | Elassoma alabamae | Spring pygmy sunfish |
| | | Crystallaria cincotta | Diamond darter |
| | | Etheostoma chermocki | Vermilion darter |
| | | Etheostoma boschungi | Slackwater darter |
| | | Etheostoma chienense | Relict darter |
| | | Etheostoma etowahae | Etowah darter |
| | | Etheostoma fonticola | Fountain darter |
| | | Etheostoma moorei | Yellowcheek darter |
| | | Etheostoma nianguae | Niangua darter |
| | | Etheostoma nuchale | Watercress darter |
| | | Etheostoma okaloosae | Okaloosa darter |
| | | Etheostoma phytophilum | Rush darter |
| | | Etheostoma rubrum | Bayou darter |
| Perciformes | Percidae | Etheostoma scotti | Cherokee darter |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Etheostoma sp. | Bluemask (= jewel) darter |
| | | Etheostoma susanae | Cumberland darter |
| | | Etheostoma wapiti | Boulder darter |
| | | Percina antesella | Amber darter |
| | | Percina aurolineata | Goldline darter |
| | | Percina jenkinsi | Conasauga logperch |
| | | Percina pantherina | Leopard darter |
| | | Percina tanasi | Snail darter |
| | | Cottus sp. | Grotto sculpin |
| Scorpaeniformes | Cottidae | Cottus paulus (= pygmaeus) | Pygmy sculpin |
| | Clariidae | All species | Air-breathing catfish |
| | | Noturus baileyi | Smoky madtom |
| | | Noturus crypticus | Chucky madtom |
| | | Noturus placidus | Neosho madtom |
| | | Noturus stanauli | Pygmy madtom |
| Siluriformes | Ictaluridae | Noturus trautmani | Scioto madtom |
| Synbranchiformes | Synbranchidae | Monopterus albus | Swamp eel |
| **MAMMALS** | | | |
| Order | Family | Genus/Species | Common Name |
| | Suidae | All Species | Pigs or Hogs* |
| Artiodactyla | Cervidae | All Species | Deer* |
| | Canidae | All Species | Wild Dogs,* Wolves, Coyotes or Coyote hybrids, Jackals and Foxes |
| | Ursidae | All Species | Bears* |
| | Procyonidae | All Species | Raccoons and* Relatives |
| | Mustelidae | All Species (except Mustela putorius furo) | Weasels, Badgers,* Skunks and Otters<br>Ferret |
| | Viverridae | All Species | Civets, Genets,* Lingsangs, Mongooses, and Fossas |
| | Herpestidae | All Species | Mongooses* |
| | Hyaenidae | All Species | Hyenas and Aardwolves* |
| Carnivora | Felidae | All Species | Cats* |
| Chiroptera | | All Species | Bats* |
| | | Brachylagus idahoensis | Pygmy rabbit |
| | | Lepus europeaeous | European hare |
| | | Oryctolagus cuniculus | European rabbit |
| | | Sylvilagus bachmani riparius | Riparian brush rabbit |
| Lagomorpha | Lepridae | Sylvilagus palustris hefneri | Lower Keys marsh rabbit |
| | | All species native to Africa | All species native to Africa |
| | Dipodidae | Zapus hudsonius preblei | Preble's meadow jumping mouse |
| | | Microtus californicus scirpensis | Amargosa vole |
| | | Microtus mexicanus hualpaiensis | Hualapai Mexican vole |
| | | Microtus pennsylvanicus dukecampbelli | Florida salt marsh vole |
| | | Neotoma floridana smalli | Key Largo woodrat |
| | | Neotoma fuscipes riparia | Riparian (= San Joaquin Valley) woodrat |
| Rodentia | Muridae | Oryzomys palustris natator | Rice rat |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Peromyscus gossypinus allapaticola | Key Largo cotton mouse |
| | | Peromyscus polionotus allophrys | Choctawhatchee beach mouse |
| | | Peromyscus polionotus ammobates | Alabama beach mouse |
| | | Peromyscus polionotus niveiventris | Southeastern beach mouse |
| | | Peromyscus polionotus peninsularis | St. Andrew beach mouse |
| | | Peromyscus polionotus phasma | Anastasia Island beach mouse |
| | | Peromyscus polionotus trissyllepsis | Perdido Key beach mouse |
| | | Reithrodontomys raviventris | Salt marsh harvest mouse |
| | | Dipodomys heermanni morroensis | Morro Bay kangaroo rat |
| | | Dipodomys ingens | Giant kangaroo rat |
| | | Dipodomys merriami parvus | San Bernadino Merriam's kangaroo rat |
| | | Dipodomys nitratoides exilis | Fresno kangaroo rat |
| | | Dipodomys nitratoides nitratoides | Tipton kangaroo rat |
| | | Dipodomys stephensi (including D. cascus) | Stephens' kangaroo rat |
| | Heteromyidae | Perognathus longimembris pacificus | Pacific pocket mouse |
| | | Cynomys spp. | Prairie dogs |
| | | Spermophilus brunneus brunneus | Northern Idaho ground squirrel |
| | Sciuridae | Tamiasciurus hudsonicus grahamensis | Mount Graham red squirrel |
| Soricomorpha | Soricidae | Sorex ornatus relictus | Buena Vista Lake ornate shrew |
| **MOLLUSKS** | | | |
| Order | Family | Genus/Species | Common Name |
| Neotaenioglossa | Hydrobiidae | Potamopyrgus antipodarum | New Zealand mudsnail |
| | | Dreissena bugensis | Quagga mussel |
| Veneroida | Dreissenidae | Dreissena bugensis | Quagga mussel |
| **REPTILES** | | | |
| Order | Family | Genus/Species | Common Name |
| Crocodilia | Alligatoridae | All species | Alligators, caimans* |
| | Crocodylidae | All species | Crocodiles* |
| | Gavialidae | All species | Gavials* |
| Squamata | Colubridae | Boiga irregularis | Brown tree snake* |
| **CRUSTACEANS** | | | |
| Order | Family | Genus/Species | Common Name |
| | | Cambarus aculabrum | Cave crayfish |
| | | Cambarus zophonastes | Cave crayfish |
| | | Orconectes rusticus | Rusty crayfish |
| | | Orconectes shoupi | Nashville crayfish |
| | | Pacifastacus fortis | Shasta crayfish |
| Decapoda | Cambaridae | Procambarus sp. | Marbled crayfish |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Parastacidae | Cherax spp. | Australian crayfish |
| Varunidea | Eriocheir sinensis | Chinese mitten crab |

B. Temporary possession permit for certain animals. Notwithstanding the permitting requirements of subsection A of this section, a person, company, or corporation possessing any nonnative (exotic) animal, designated with an asterisk (*) in subsection A of this section, prior to July 1, 1992, must declare such possession in writing to the department by January 1, 1993. This written declaration shall serve as a permit for possession only, is not transferable, and must be renewed every five years. This written declaration must include species name, common name, number of individuals, date or dates acquired, sex (if possible), estimated age, height or length, and other characteristics such as bands and band numbers, tattoos, registration numbers, coloration, and specific markings. Possession transfer will require a new permit according to the requirements of this subsection.

C. Exception for certain monk parakeets. A permit is not required for monk parakeets (quakers) that have been captive bred and are closed-banded with a seamless band.

D. Exception for parts or products. A permit is not required for parts or products of those nonnative (exotic) animals listed in subsection A of this section that may be used for personal use, in the manufacture of products, or used in scientific research, provided that such parts or products be packaged outside the Commonwealth by any person, company, or corporation duly licensed by the state in which the parts originate. Such packages may be transported into the Commonwealth, consistent with other state laws and regulations, so long as the original package remains unbroken, unopened and intact until its point of destination is reached. Documentation concerning the type and cost of the animal parts ordered, the purpose and date of the order, point and date of shipping, and date of receiving shall be kept by the person, business, or institution ordering such nonnative (exotic) animal parts. Such documentation shall be open to inspection by a representative of the Department of Wildlife Resources.

~~E. Exception for prairie dogs. The effective date of listing of prairie dogs under subsection A of this section shall be January 1, 1998. Prairie dogs possessed in captivity in Virginia on December 31, 1997, may be maintained in captivity until the animals' deaths, but they may not be sold on or after January 1, 1998, without a permit.~~

~~F.~~E. Exception for snakehead fish. Anglers may legally harvest snakehead fish of the family Channidae, provided that they immediately kill such fish ~~and that they notify the department, as soon as practicable, of such actions~~.

~~G.~~F. Exception for feral hogs. Anyone may legally trap feral hogs with written permission of the landowner, provided that any trapped hogs are not removed from the trap site alive and are killed immediately.

~~H.~~G. Exception for grass carp. Anglers may legally harvest grass carp of the family Cyprinidae only from public waters of the Commonwealth. It is unlawful to harvest grass carp from any public inland lake or reservoir. Anglers taking grass carp must ensure that harvested grass carp are dead.

~~I.~~H. Exception for Alabama bass. Anglers may possess live Alabama bass of the family Centrarchidae only on the body of water from which the fish were captured, provided that the angler does not live transport these fish outside of the body of water from which the fish were captured. Anglers may only release live Alabama bass back into the body of water from which the fish were captured. Anglers may legally harvest Alabama bass provided that the anglers ensure all harvested Alabama bass are dead.

~~J.~~I. All other nonnative (exotic) animals. All other nonnative (exotic) animals not listed in subsection A of this section may be possessed, purchased, and sold; provided, that such animals shall be subject to all applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations, including those that apply to threatened/endangered species, and further provided, that such animals shall not be liberated within the Commonwealth.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

***Remove reporting requirements associated with northern snakehead:*** At the time that this amendment was originally made to the regulation, the DWR was using reporting of northern snakeheads as a means of monitoring the potential spread of the species into other waterbodies in Virginia and possibly eradicating local new populations/animals. At present, the species is well established in many waters of the state and outreach campaigns have raised awareness about reporting northern snakehead where anglers may first encounter them. As such, the reporting requirement is no longer needed as a surveillance tool.

***Removal of exception for prairie dogs:*** At the time that this amendment was made to the regulation, the DWR recognized that prairie dogs had been a species relatively common in the pet trade. As such, the agency accommodated the needs of individuals who owned those animals at the time of enactment to continue possessing those animals until those animals died. The average lifespan of a prairie dog in captivity is seven (7) years. While the designation of prairie dogs as predatory and undesirable species remains, this particular amendment was enacted 21 years ago and is no longer needed as the elapsed time greatly exceeds the lifespan of this species.

**4VAC15-40-282**

**Game: In General: Unauthorized feeding of bear.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to remove the requirement that a person be notified by Department personnel that they are purposefully or inadvertently feeding a bear(s) prior to being found in violation of this regulation.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-40-282. Unauthorized feeding of bear.**

It shall be unlawful for any person as defined in § 1-230 of the Code of Virginia to place, distribute, or allow the placement of food, minerals, carrion, trash, or similar substances to feed or attract bear. Nor~~, upon notification by department personnel,~~ shall any person continue to place, distribute, or allow the placement of any food, mineral, carrion, trash, or similar substances for any purpose if the placement of these materials results in the presence of bear~~.~~ ~~After such notification,~~ ~~such person shall be in violation of this section if the placing, distribution, or presence of such food, minerals, carrion, trash, or similar substances continues.~~ This section shall not apply to wildlife management activities conducted or authorized by the department.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

It has been illegal to feed bears in Virginia since 2003, with a modification to the regulation in 2011 to further specify attractants and responsible parties. The unauthorized feeding of bears, either intentionally or unintentionally through unsecured attractants, accounts for over 70% of all reported human-bear conflict calls each year. These attractants include birdseed, residential garbage, pet or domestic livestock feed, and/or foods placed out specifically to attract bears. Unauthorized feeding of bears has been addressed in each iteration of the Virginia Bear Management Plan and is included in Goal 5: Human-Bear Conflict, of the 2023-2032 plan. Within this goal area, strategies to prevent and mitigate human-bear conflict center around enforcement of 4VAC15-40-282 and education on problems associated with unsecured attractants.

Each year, escalated feeding situations (often intentional feeding) occur that result in the humane dispatch of the bear(s) involved due to extreme habituation and food conditioned behaviors. These scenarios are often unreported until they have escalated to a high level. Additionally, disease transmission (e.g. sarcoptic mange) from the unnatural congregation of animals at a feeding site can exacerbate health and welfare concerns, while also creating human health and wildlife conflict concerns. The requirement for a prior notification in instances such as these are contrary to the intent of the feeding regulation and can lead to the problem continuing to escalate, often impacting multiple property owners and members of the public.

Since 2013, most human-bear conflict calls are reported through the USDA-WS Conflict Helpline. Bear conflict calls peaked in 2020 with a total of 3,500 calls while FY24 had 2,431. Even with the assistance of the Conflict Helpline, bear conflict calls often result in copious amounts of staff time to investigate and resolve. Many situations involve more than a single property/person and can occupy both wildlife and law division staff throughout most of the spring and summer months.

The "prior notification" requirement can increase staff time devoted to these conflict/feeding situations due to the necessity of making multiple visits to the same property. Notifications can come in various forms but are most often a signed letter given to the person by a CPO. Following the notification, it is then the responsibility of the officer to follow back up with the person to ensure that compliance with the feeding regulation per the notification has occurred.

It is important to note that the removal of the prior notification clause does not mean that a citation would automatically be issued by an officer during an initial investigation or report of feeding. As clearly indicated by DWR Law Enforcement Officers, situational officer discretion and the ability to provide warnings versus a citation is used when enforcing all of the DWR (or other VA specific) regulations with or without notification requirement. The requirement of prior notification and the additional time and resources needed to ensure compliance limits officers in their ability to quickly resolve public safety issues where time is a critical component in preventing escalation and subsequent effect to property and human safety. In a majority of instances, a warning or notification will often still be the first course of action to educate the person on the issue. But in instances where egregious feeding is occurring, particularly where adjoining properties or/people are being impacted, the ability to issue a citation immediately would expedite the resolution of the issue.

Information pertaining to the bear feeding regulation can be found on all DWR bear handout materials (BearWise® brochures, Living with Black Bears), the DWR bear website, the DWR annual Hunting and Trapping digest, and throughout many partner agency brochures or recreation areas (US Forest Service, Virginia State Parks). This point is also reiterated in all bear management presentations across the state and in most media contacts pertaining to bears in Virginia.

**4VAC15-40-310 (NEW)**

**Game: In General: Dispatch of game or furbearers by authorized persons**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to establish that Department staff or designees may authorize citizens to dispatch severely injured or diseased game and fur-bearing animals and nonmigratory game birds for animal welfare reasons.

**Proposed language of the amendment**:

**4VAC15-40-310. Dispatch of game or furbearers**

A. The Director or his designee may, in their discretion, authorize a person to dispatch any non-migratory game bird, furbearing animal, or game animal (except elk) as those animals are defined in §29.1-100, provided that the authorizing official is satisfied that the animal is actively exhibiting clear signs of severe injury or disease.

B. The authorizing official may award the carcass of such animal or bird to any person, along with a call for service or report number, provided that the parts of any animal dispatched under this authorization shall not be used for the purposes of taxidermy, mounts, contests or any public display unless authorized by the Director or his designee.

C. Where a deer is the animal authorized to be dispatched, the carcass or parts of it may not be removed from a disease management area except under the provisions of 4 VAC 15-90-293.

[D. This section is subject to applicable firearm laws, including the safe discharge of firearms.

E. This section is subject to applicable trespass laws.]

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed with the following modification: Add explicit assurances that this new regulation will not authorize a person dispatching an animal to circumvent trespass or firearms laws. A number of comments received during the public review period expressed concerns about potential abuse of this regulation with regards to trespass and use of weapons.**

**Rationale:**

The number of diseased and injured animals reported to Department (DWR) staff and to the Wildlife Conflict Helpline has increased in recent years and this number is projected to increase further in the future. Due to the volume of these reports and when they are received, DWR staff, local law enforcement officers including animal control, or other authorized professionals are often unable to respond in-person to address these situations in an expedient manner. Citizens frequently encounter, and are often willing to dispatch, injured or diseased animals. There is often confusion and an extended wait time for citizens who are requesting the ability to dispatch

an animal for welfare purposes that has been involved in a vehicle collision, mortally injured by farm machinery, or is showing signs of severe physical or neurological issues from disease. It is currently unlawful for a person to dispatch an animal outside of a hunting season or without a specific permit issued for other purposes (e.g., kill permit, scientific collection permit). This regulation would allow staff from multiple divisions within the DWR, or their designee, to expedite dispatch to provide relief for gravely injured or diseased wildlife while still enabling the Department to collect any needed biological or disease samples or information from these animals. DWR internal guidelines will provide for situational applicability, appropriate designees, and guidelines for dispatch to ensure clarity and consistency.

This proposal minimizes opportunities for abuse in several ways. This proposal is limited to resident species that are generally hunted or trapped to prevent any unintended impacts to threatened or endangered species or any conflicts with federal authority. The requirement for obtaining authorization from the Department Director (or designee) before dispatching an injured animal enables the Department to determine the need, provide appropriate guidance, obtain appropriate samples, and document the situation. The proposal enables a person to possess and use a dispatched animal with appropriate reporting and accountability.

# Furbearer & Waterfowl Blind Regulations

**4VAC15-160-31**

**Game: Opossum: Open season for trapping**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to include private lands where permission to trap has been granted by the landowner to the list of areas where there is a continuous open trapping season for this species.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

## 4VAC15-160-31. Open season for trapping.

It shall be lawful to trap opossum from November 15 through the last day of February, both dates inclusive, except there shall be a continuous open season to trap opossum within the incorporated limits of any city or town in the Commonwealth, ~~and~~ in the counties of Arlington, Chesterfield, Fairfax, Henrico, James City, Loudoun, Prince William, Spotsylvania, Stafford, Roanoke and York, and upon private lands throughout the Commonwealth with permission of the landowner.

## Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.

**Rationale:**

The Code of Virginia (§29.1-517) enables a landowner to take furbearers during closed season under certain conditions. However, the Code section doesn't clearly extend this authority to the landowner's agent. Including the landowner and those to whom they grant permission to trap on their lands within the current continuous open season for trapping of opossums more clearly extends the landowner's authority within the Code to those whom permission has been granted to address specific issues involving opossums on their lands.

**4VAC15-210-51**

**Game: Raccoon: Open season for trapping**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to include private lands where permission to trap has been granted by the landowner to the list of areas where there is a continuous open trapping season for this species.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

## 4VAC15-210-51. Open season for trapping.

It shall be lawful to trap raccoon from November 15 through the last day of February, both dates inclusive, except there shall be a continuous open season to trap raccoon within the incorporated limits of any city or town in the Commonwealth, ~~and~~ in the counties of Arlington, Chesterfield, Fairfax, Henrico, James City, Loudoun, Prince William, Spotsylvania, Stafford, Roanoke and York, and upon private lands throughout the Commonwealth with permission of the landowner.

## Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.

**Rationale:**

The Code of Virginia (§29.1-517) enables a landowner to take furbearers during closed season under certain conditions. However, the Code section doesn't clearly extend this authority to the landowner's agent. Including the landowner and those to whom they grant permission to trap on their lands within the current continuous open season for trapping of raccoons more clearly extends the landowner's authority within the Code to those whom permission has been granted to address specific issues involving raccoons on their lands.

**4VAC15-170-30**

**Game: Otter: Pelts to be sealed before sale, etc.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to enable the Department to authorize individuals other than Department staffs to affix a CITES tag to an otter pelt to enhance efficiency of administering the CITES program in Virginia.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-170-30. Pelts to be sealed before sale, etc.**

It shall be unlawful to buy, sell, barter, exchange, traffic or trade in, bargain for, solicit for, purchase or transport out of the Commonwealth, any otter pelts until the pelts have been sealed by an agent ~~of~~ or other individual designated by the department. This requirement shall not apply to licensed taxidermists who ship otter pelts out of state for tanning purposes or to individuals who ship otter pelts out of state to be tanned for personal use. All otter pelts required to be sealed under the provisions of this chapter must be sealed not later than April 1 of the license year in which the animal is taken.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

The proposed change will allow for trappers to receive and affix a CITES tag to an otter pelt themselves after providing harvest information to the department. Currently only agents of the Department can affix CITES tags to otters. The proposed change will make it easier and more cost effective for trappers to receive the tags, improve the data collection process for otter harvest, and decrease the administrative burden on Department staff who currently administer most of the tags for otters.

This proposed change provide consistency with the current Department regulation for affixing CITES tags to bobcat pelts (4VAC15-170-30).

**4VAC15-260-50**

**Game: Waterfowl Blinds: Blinds in the City of Virginia Beach.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to clarify that the regulation allows for the purchase of new riparian stationary waterfowl blind licenses on shore in the City of Virginia Beach.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-260-50. Blinds in the City of Virginia Beach.**

In the City of Virginia Beach, except for blinds and floating blind sites which may be erected by the department, no new blinds in the public waters shall be erected and no licenses shall be issued for the erection of new ~~shore or~~ stationary water blinds ~~upon the shores or~~ in the public waters, nor may floating or mat blinds anchor within 500 yards of the shores of lands or blinds owned or controlled by the department except floating blinds may be stationed at sites designated by the department. Blinds and floating blind sites erected by the department shall not be licensed, but there shall be a metal plate affixed to such blinds for identification purposes.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

The intent of this regulation was to prevent new stationary blinds from being licensed in the public waters in the City of Virginia Beach not to prevent new stationary blinds from being licensed on land. The amendment aligns the regulation with state code 29.1-340.

# Firearms Regulations

**4VAC15-40-60**

**Game: In General: Hunting with dogs or possession of weapons in certain locations during closed season.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to repeal this regulation as the language within most subsections is not consistent with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

~~**4VAC15-40-60. Hunting with dogs or possession of weapons in certain locations during closed season.**~~

~~A. Department-owned and national forest lands statewide. It shall be unlawful to have in possession a firearm or any hunting weapon that is not unloaded and cased or dismantled on all national forest lands statewide and on department-owned lands and on other lands managed by the department under cooperative agreement except during the period when it is lawful to take bear, deer, grouse, pheasant, quail, rabbit, raccoon, squirrel, turkey, waterfowl, or migratory gamebirds on these lands.~~

~~B. Certain counties. Except as otherwise provided in 4VAC15-40-70, it shall be unlawful to have either a shotgun or a rifle in one's possession when accompanied by a dog in the daytime in the fields, forests or waters of the Counties of Augusta, Clarke, Frederick, Page, Shenandoah, and Warren, and in the counties east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, except Patrick, at any time except the periods prescribed by law to hunt game birds and animals.~~

~~C. Shooting ranges and authorized activities. The provisions of this section shall not prohibit the conduct of any activities authorized by the board or the establishment and operation of archery and shooting ranges on the lands described in subsections A and B of this section. The use of firearms or any hunting weapon in such ranges during the closed season period will be restricted to the area within the established range boundaries. Such weapons shall be required to be unloaded and cased or dismantled in all areas other than the range boundaries. The use of firearms or any hunting weapon during the closed hunting period in such ranges shall be restricted to target shooting only, and no birds or animals shall be molested.~~

~~D. It shall be unlawful to chase with a dog or train dogs on national forest lands or department-owned lands except during authorized hunting, chase, or training seasons that specifically permit these activities on these lands or during raccoon hound field trials on these lands between September 1 and March 31, both dates inclusive, that are sanctioned by bona fide national kennel clubs and authorized by permits issued by the department or the U.S. Forest Service.~~

~~E. It shall be unlawful to possess or transport any loaded firearm or loaded hunting weapon in or on any vehicle at any time on national forest lands or department-owned lands.~~

~~F. The provisions of this section shall not prohibit the possession, transport, and use of loaded firearms by employees of the Department of Wildlife Resources while engaged in the performance of their authorized and official duties, nor shall it prohibit possession and transport~~

~~of loaded concealed handguns where the individual possesses a concealed handgun permit as defined in § 18.2-308 of the Code of Virginia.~~

~~G. Meaning of "possession" of any hunting weapon and definition of "loaded crossbow," "loaded arrowgun," "loaded muzzleloader," and "loaded firearm." For the purpose of this section, the word "possession" shall include having any firearm or weapon used for hunting in or on one's person, vehicle, or conveyance. For the purpose of this section, a "loaded firearm" means a firearm in which ammunition is chambered or loaded in the magazine or clip when such magazine or clip is engaged or partially engaged in a firearm. The definition of a "loaded muzzleloader" will include a muzzleloading rifle, pistol, or shotgun that is capped, has a charged pan, or has a primer or battery installed in the muzzleloader. A "loaded crossbow" means a crossbow that is cocked and has either a bolt or arrow engaged or partially engaged on the shooting rail or track of the crossbow, or with a "trackless crossbow" when the crossbow is cocked and a bolt or arrow is nocked. "Loaded arrowgun" means an arrowgun that has an arrow or bolt inserted on the arrow rest or in the barrel. "Hunting weapon" means any weapon allowable for hunting as defined in § 29.1-519 of the Code of Virginia.~~

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

It is well established through historical application and case law that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution provides for the right to keep and bear arms and that this right shall not be infringed. While the right to keep and bear arms isn't unlimited and there are certain circumstances and situations where such right is restricted, these restrictions apply to background checks, felony convictions, and possession in sensitive locations. As recent case law continues to clarify that such restrictions don't apply to department-owned and managed lands or hunting situations, Department staffs have reviewed relevant regulations to ensure the consistency of these regulations with an individual's right under the Second Amendment. As much of the language of this regulation is not consistent with an individual's right under the Second Amendment, the proposal is to repeal this regulation. Subsections of this regulation pertaining to shooting ranges on department-owned lands and hunting with dogs on National Forest and department-owned lands will be retained as separate, new regulations, and as appropriate, language within those new regulations will ensure consistency with an individual's right under the Second Amendment.

**4VAC15-40-61 (New)**

**Game: In General: Hunting and trapping on National Forest, state forest, and department-owned or managed lands.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to (i) establish a regulation outlining the period during which hunting and trapping may occur on national forest and department-owned and managed lands that maintains the current timeframe for hunting and trapping on these lands, and (ii) include state forest lands in this regulation as these lands are managed similar to National Forest and department-owned and managed lands.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-40-61. Hunting and trapping on National Forest, state forest, and department-owned or managed lands.**

A. Except as provided in subsection B of this regulation, it shall be unlawful to hunt or trap, as defined in §29.1-100, on all national forest lands and state forest lands statewide and on department-owned and managed lands except during the period when it is lawful to take bear, deer, grouse, pheasant, quail, rabbit, raccoon, squirrel, turkey, waterfowl, or migratory gamebirds on these lands.

B. It shall be lawful to chase with a dog or train dogs on national forest lands, state forest lands, or department-owned and managed lands during authorized hunting, chase, or training seasons that specifically permit these activities on these lands or during raccoon hound field trials on these lands between September 1 and March 31, both dates inclusive, that are sanctioned by bona fide national kennel clubs and authorized by permits issued by the department or the U.S. Forest Service. Otherwise, such activities on these lands shall be unlawful.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

(i) While 4VAC15-40-60 is proposed for repeal because much of the language of the regulation is not consistent with an individual's Second Amendment right, one aspect of that regulation which should be retained is a provision outlining the times when hunting and trapping, including hunting with dogs, can occur on National Forest and department-owned and managed lands. This proposal ensures that opportunities to hunt and trap on these lands remain consistent with current practices and ensures consistency with an individual's right under the Second Amendment in conjunction with use of national forest and department-owned lands.

(ii) The State Forests are managed for multiple resources and provide many user groups outdoor opportunities other than hunting. The management on the State Forests are similar to those of the Department lands and the National Forests. Adding State Forests to the regulations where Department Lands and National Forests impose seasonal limits, would encompass those public lands which are operated in a like manner.

**4VAC15-40-62 (New)**

**Game: In General: Shooting ranges on department-owned and managed lands.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to establish a regulation providing for the use of firearms on department-owned and managed lands as well as shooting ranges located on department-owned and managed lands that is consistent with an individual's right under the Second Amendment.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-40-62. Shooting ranges on department-owned and managed lands.**

A. It shall be unlawful to use or discharge a firearm or hunting weapon as defined in §29.1-519 on department-owned and managed lands other than to take legal wildlife while hunting or trapping during open seasons as defined in 4VAC15-40-61.

B. Discharge of a firearm or hunting weapon for target shooting is prohibited on department-owned and managed lands, except on designated shooting ranges designed for specific firearms and hunting weapons on posted days and hours during which the range is open for operation.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

While 4VAC15-40-60 is proposed for repeal because much of the language of the regulation is not consistent with an individual's Second Amendment right, one aspect of that regulation which should be retained is a provision for target shooting at designated ranges on department-owned and managed lands. This proposal ensures continued availability of target shooting at existing shooting ranges without changing operational details and ensures consistency with an individual's right under the Second Amendment in conjunction with use of department-owned lands.

**4VAC15-40-70**

**Game: In General: Open dog training season**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to clarify language regarding the "possession" of firearms while training dogs to ensure consistency with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-40-70. Open dog training season.**

A. Private lands and certain military areas. It shall be lawful to train dogs during daylight hours on squirrels and nonmigratory game birds on private lands, and on rabbits and nonmigratory game birds on Fort A. P. Hill, Fort Pickett, and Quantico Marine Reservation. Participants in this dog training season shall not ~~have~~ use any weapons other than starter pistols ~~in their possession~~ to train dogs, must comply with all regulations and laws pertaining to hunting, and no game shall be taken; provided, however, that weapons may be ~~in possession~~ used on private lands when training dogs on captive raised and properly marked mallards and pigeons so that they may be immediately shot or recovered.

B. It shall be lawful to train dogs on rabbits on private lands from 1/2 hour before sunrise to midnight.

C. Designated portions of certain department-owned lands. It shall be lawful to train dogs on quail on designated portions of the Amelia Wildlife Management Area, Cavalier Wildlife Management Area, Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area, Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area, Dick Cross Wildlife Management Area, Mattaponi Wildlife Management Area, and White Oak Mountain Wildlife Management Area from September 1 to the day prior to the opening date of the quail hunting season, both dates inclusive. Participants in this dog training season shall not ~~have~~ use any weapons other than starter pistols ~~in their possession~~ to train dogs, shall not release pen-raised birds, must comply with all regulations and laws pertaining to hunting, and no game shall be taken.

D. Designated department-owned lands. It shall be lawful to train dogs during daylight hours on rabbits and nonmigratory game birds on the Weston Wildlife Management Area from September 1 to March 31, both dates inclusive. Participants in this dog training season shall not ~~have~~ use any weapons other than starter pistols ~~in their possession~~ to train dogs, shall not release pen-raised birds, must comply with all regulations and laws pertaining to hunting, and no game shall be taken.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

It is well established through historical application and case law that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution provides for the right to keep and bear arms and that this right shall not be infringed. While the right to keep and bear arms isn't unlimited and there are certain

circumstances and situations where such right is restricted, these restrictions apply to background checks, felony convictions, and possession in sensitive locations. As recent case law continues to clarify that such restrictions don't apply to department-owned and managed lands or hunting situations, Department staffs have reviewed relevant regulations to ensure the consistency of these regulations with an individual's right under the Second Amendment. While an individual's rights under Second Amendment may permit possession of a firearm in many circumstances, the right to such possession doesn't authorize the use of a firearm for hunting. Lawful use of firearms for hunting remains controlled by applicable laws and regulations.

**4VAC15-210-10**

**Game: Raccoon: Open season; raccoon chase on areas open to bear hound training; possession of certain devices unlawful.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to clarify language regarding the possession of a firearm and other weapons while engaged in the act of chasing a raccoon to ensure consistency with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-210-10. Open season; raccoon chase on areas open to bear hound training; possession of certain devices unlawful.**

A. Except as otherwise specifically provided in the sections appearing in this chapter, there shall be a continuous open season for chasing raccoon with dogs, without capturing or taking, except on department-controlled lands west of the Blue Ridge Mountains and on national forest lands.

B. It shall be lawful to chase raccoon with dogs, without capturing or taking, on department-controlled lands west of the Blue Ridge Mountains and on national forest lands where bear hound training is permitted during the season dates specified in 4VAC15-50-120.

C. It shall be unlawful to ~~have in possession~~ use for the purpose of chasing or taking a raccoon a firearm, bow, or crossbow, and have in possession an axe, saw, or any tree climbing device while hunting during this chase season. ~~The meaning of "possession" for the purpose of this section shall include, but not be limited to, having these devices in or on one's person, vehicle, or conveyance while engaged in the act of chasing.~~

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

It is well established through historical application and case law that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution provides for the right to keep and bear arms and that this right shall not be infringed. While the right to keep and bear arms isn't unlimited and there are certain circumstances and situations where such right is restricted, these restrictions apply to background checks, felony convictions, and possession in sensitive locations. As recent case law continues to clarify that such restrictions don't apply to department-owned and managed lands or hunting situations, Department staffs have reviewed relevant regulations to ensure the consistency of these regulations with an individual's right under the Second Amendment. While an individual's rights under Second Amendment may permit possession of a firearm in many circumstances, the right to such possession doesn't authorize the use of a firearm for hunting. Lawful use of firearms for hunting remains controlled by applicable laws and regulations.

**4VAC15-70-60**

**Game: Bobcat: Archery hunting with bow and arrow, crossbow, or slingbow.**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to clarify language regarding the possession of a firearm during the bobcat archery season to ensure consistency with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-70-60. Archery hunting with bow and arrow, crossbow, or slingbow.**

A. Season. It shall be lawful to hunt bobcats with bow and arrow, crossbow, or slingbow from the first Saturday in October through October 31, both dates inclusive.

B. ~~Carrying~~ Using firearms to hunt prohibited. It shall be unlawful to ~~carry~~ use firearms to hunt any game species while hunting with bow and arrow, crossbow, or slingbow during the special archery seasons.

C. Use of dogs prohibited during the special archery season. It shall be unlawful to use dogs when hunting with bow and arrow, crossbow, or slingbow during any special archery season.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

It is well established through historical application and case law that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution provides for the right to keep and bear arms and that this right shall not be infringed. While the right to keep and bear arms isn't unlimited and there are certain circumstances and situations where such right is restricted, these restrictions apply to background checks, felony convictions, and possession in sensitive locations. As recent case law continues to clarify that such restrictions don't apply to department-owned and managed lands or hunting situations, Department staffs have reviewed relevant regulations to ensure the consistency of these regulations with an individual's right under the Second Amendment. While an individual's rights under Second Amendment may permit possession of a firearm in many circumstances, the right to such possession doesn't authorize the use of a firearm for hunting. Lawful use of firearms for hunting remains controlled by applicable laws and regulations.

**4VAC15-240-60**

**Game: Turkey: Archery Hunting**

**Summary:**

The proposal is to clarify language regarding the possession of a firearm during the archery season for turkeys to ensure consistency with the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.

**Proposed language of amendment:**

**4VAC15-240-60. Archery hunting.**

A. Season. It shall be lawful to hunt turkey with archery equipment or a slingbow in those counties and areas open to fall turkey hunting from the first Saturday in October through the Friday prior to the third Monday in November, both dates inclusive.

B. Bag limit. The daily and seasonal bag limit for hunting turkey with archery equipment or a slingbow shall be the same as permitted during the general turkey season in those counties and areas open to fall turkey hunting, and any turkey taken shall apply toward the total season bag limit.

C. ~~Carrying~~ Using firearms to hunt prohibited. It shall be unlawful to ~~carry~~ use firearms to hunt any game species while hunting with archery equipment or a slingbow during the special archery season.

D. Use of dogs prohibited during archery season. It shall be unlawful to use dogs when hunting with archery equipment from the first Saturday in October through the Saturday prior to the second Monday in November, both dates inclusive.

**Staff Final Recommendation – Staff recommends adoption of the amendments as final in the form they were proposed.**

**Rationale:**

It is well established through historical application and case law that the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution provides for the right to keep and bear arms and that this right shall not be infringed. While the right to keep and bear arms isn't unlimited and there are certain circumstances and situations where such right is restricted, these restrictions apply to background checks, felony convictions, and possession in sensitive locations. As recent case law continues to clarify that such restrictions don't apply to department-owned and managed lands or hunting situations, Department staffs have reviewed relevant regulations to ensure the consistency of these regulations with an individual's right under the Second Amendment. While an individual's rights under Second Amendment may permit possession of a firearm in many circumstances, the right to such possession doesn't authorize the use of a firearm for hunting. Lawful use of firearms for hunting remains controlled by applicable laws and regulations.

# VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

# BOATING AND ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

## Final Staff Recommendations May 2025

**Summary of Proposed Changes to Boating Regulations:**

- 4VAC15-410-30 – REPEAL – Phase in is complete and schedule is now obsolete
- 4VAC15-410-40 - B – AMEND to clarify the minimum standards for boating safety education course competency
- 4VAC15-410-50 A-D – REPEAL current section A, amend Section B, and renumber sections to clarify responsibilities of course providers
- 4VAC15-410-70 – AMEND to combine 4VAC15-410-80 into this section and reduce redundant language found in sections regarding course certificates and student records
- 4VAC15-410-80 – REPEAL – necessary pieces to be incorporated into section 70
- 4VAC15-410-90 – AMEND section on Instructor Certification to simplify section eliminate redundant language in regulation
- 4VAC15-410-100-B – REPEAL section B regarding the specific requirements of an open-book test. This can be managed through internal policy.
- 4VAC15-410-110 A and C – AMEND – Eliminate redundant language in regulation that is already included in definition of equivalency exam. REPEAL section C as this re-iterates what is already in the definitions.
- 4VAC15-410-130 – AMEND Section A to include one sentence from section B. Section B will be REPEALED
- 4VAC15-410-140 – AMEND Section B to eliminate unnecessary specifications on the contents of an application or the documentation required. REPEAL section D as that is no longer the process for obtaining a replacement card.
- 4VAC15-430-60 – AMEND – Remove section 4 as it is already stated in 4VAC-15-430-30 Section 3.
- 4VAC15-430-150 – AMEND to clarify the requirement. Existing regulation is related to the building of a vessel.
- 4VAC15-430-160 – AMEND to provide correct web address.
- 4VAC15-430-170 – AMEND to remove section D which is not required by CFR
- 4VAC15-430-210 – AMEND to clarify the requirement. Existing regulation is related to the building of a vessel.
- 4VAC-15-400 – AMEND forms to remove all except the Virginia Boating Incident Report form

Not Boating Related

- 4VAC15-20-120. REPEAL as this is not the current practice of the agency.

**Virginia Administrative Code**
**Title 4. Conservation And Natural Resources**
**Agency 15. Department of Wildlife Resources**
**Chapter 410. Watercraft: Boating Safety Education**

4VAC15-410-30. ~~Compliance schedule and phase-in provisions.~~ (REPEALED)

~~The requirements for boating safety education shall be phased in according to the following provisions:~~

~~1. Personal watercraft operators 20 years of age or younger shall meet the requirements by July 1, 2009;~~
~~2. Personal watercraft operators 35 years of age or younger shall meet the requirements by July 1, 2010;~~
~~3. Personal watercraft operators 50 years of age or younger and motorboat operators 20 years of age or younger shall meet the requirements by July 1, 2011;~~
~~4. All personal watercraft operators, regardless of age, and motorboat operators 30 years of age or younger shall meet the requirements by July 1, 2012;~~
~~5. Motorboat operators 40 years of age or younger shall meet the requirements by July 1, 2013;~~
~~6. Motorboat operators 45 years of age or younger shall meet the requirements by July 1, 2014;~~
~~7. Motorboat operators 50 years of age or younger shall meet the requirements by July 1, 2015;~~
~~8. All motorboat operators, regardless of age, shall meet the requirements by July 1, 2016.~~

Statutory Authority
§§ 29.1-701, 29.1-735, and 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia.
Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 24, Issue 23, eff. July 1, 2008.

4VAC15-410-40. Provisions for compliance and minimum standards for boating safety education course competency.

A. A person shall be considered in compliance with the requirements for boating safety education if he meets one or more of the following provisions pursuant to § 29.1-735.2 B 1 through 9 of the Code of Virginia:
   1. Completes and passes a boating safety education course;
   2. Passes an equivalency exam;
   3. Possesses a valid license to operate a vessel issued to maritime personnel by the United States Coast Guard or a marine certificate issued by the Canadian government or possesses a Canadian Pleasure Craft Operator's Card. For the purposes of this subsection a license is considered valid regardless of whether the license is current;
   4. Possesses a temporary operator's certificate;
   5. Possesses a rental or lease agreement from a motorboat or personal watercraft rental or leasing business that lists the person as the authorized operator of the motorboat;
   6. Operates the motorboat under onboard direct supervision of a person who meets the requirements of this section;
   7. Is a nonresident temporarily using the waters of Virginia for a period not to exceed 90 days (which means operating a boat not registered in Virginia), and meets any applicable boating safety education requirements of the state of residency, or possesses a Canadian Pleasure Craft Operator's Card;
   8. Has assumed operation of the motorboat or personal watercraft due to the illness or physical impairment of the initial operator, and is returning the motorboat or personal watercraft to shore in order to provide assistance or care for the operator; or
   9. Is or was previously registered as a commercial fisherman pursuant to § 28.2-241 of the Code of Virginia or is under the onboard direct supervision of the commercial fisherman while operating the commercial fisherman's boat. For the purpose of operating a recreational vessel, a registered commercial fishing license is considered valid regardless of whether the license is current.

B. The minimum standards for boating safety education course competency required by the department *are a passing score of 70% on a closed-book written test upon completion of an in-person classroom boating safety education course, a passing score of 90% on an open-book written test upon completion of an in-person classroom boating safety education course, a passing score of 90% on a self-administered test in conjunction with the course material of a boating safety education course delivered through the internet, or a score of at least 80% on a proctored equivalency exam.* ~~:~~

~~1. Successful completion of a classroom boating safety education course in person and a passing score of at least 70% on a written test administered closed-book at the conclusion of the course by the designated course instructor(s) or other designated course assistant;~~

~~2. Successful completion of a classroom boating safety education course in person and a passing score of at least 90% on a written test administered open-book at the conclusion of the course by the designated course instructor(s) or other designated course assistant;~~

~~3. Successful completion of a boating safety education course offered through the Internet or through an electronic format such as CD-ROM and a passing score of at least 90% on a self-test administered in conjunction with the course material; or~~

~~4. A score of at least 80% on a proctored equivalency exam.~~

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-103, 29.1-501, 29.1-502, and 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 24, Issue 23, eff. July 1, 2008; amended, Virginia Register Volume 27, Issue 10, eff. January 1, 2011; Volume 29, Issue 9, eff. January 1, 2013.

4VAC15-410-50. Boating safety education course provider requirements.

~~A. To be an approved course provider, any individual, business, or organization that instructs or provides a boating safety education course shall execute and have on file a cooperative agreement with the department. It shall be the responsibility of the state boating law administrator to develop and execute such agreements. A list of approved course providers and boating safety education courses shall be kept by the department and made available to the public. Such list does not constitute any endorsement of any course or course provider by the department or the board~~

~~B.~~ *A.* As of January 1, 2009, *any* boating safety education courses offered by providers other than through the Internet and accepted by the department shall:

a. Be approved by NASBLA *and the department* ~~in accordance with the National Boating Education Standards, updated January 1, 2012,~~ for course content/testing; and

b. Be provided only by an approved course provider who has executed a valid cooperative agreement with the department. Such agreements may be amended at any time by the department and may be cancelled with 30 days notice upon failure of the course provider to comply with the terms and conditions of the agreement or its amendments.

~~C.~~ *B.* Any material and/or products to be used by an approved course provider that make reference to the department must be approved by the department, through the state boating law administrator, before publishing and/or distribution to the public.

~~D.~~ *C.* Any fees charged by a course provider are set by the course provider, but must be clearly communicated to the student prior to taking the course.

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-701, 29.1-735, and 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 24, Issue 23, eff. July 1, 2008; amended, Virginia Register Volume 28, Issue 10, eff. January 1, 2012.

4VAC15-410-70. Boating safety education course certificates*, record keeping, and student records*.

A. Upon successful completion of a boating safety education course *or proctored equivalency exam*, the approved course provider shall provide the student with a course certificate and/or pocket-size card. At a minimum, such certificate/card shall include the student's name and date of birth, the issuance date, the name of the course, and indication of NASBLA course approval and acceptance by the department. ~~On a schedule and in a manner mutually agreed to through a cooperative agreement, each approved course provider shall provide to the department a copy of the record of those students issued a course certificate and/or pocket-size card. Upon request by the student and subject to verification of successful course completion, it shall be the responsibility of each approved course provider to issue duplicate certificates/cards.~~

~~B. Upon successful completion of the proctored equivalency exam, the department shall issue a completion certificate and/or card, which shall include the person's name, date of birth, and the issuance date. Upon request by the person to whom the certificate/card was originally issued and subject to verification of successful completion, the department shall issue a duplicate certificate/card.~~

*B. The department shall maintain a database of all students successfully completing the department's classroom-based boating safety education course and all persons successfully completing the equivalency exam. Such database shall include, but not be limited to, student name, address, date of birth, course/equivalency exam completion date, and the specific name of the course.*

*C. Each approved course provider for boating safety education course shall maintain a database of all students successfully completing such course. The database shall include, but not be limited to, student name, address, date of birth, course completion date, and the specific name of the course. On a schedule and in a manner mutually agreed to through a cooperative agreement, each approved course provider shall provide to the department a copy of the record of those students successfully completing their course. Such record shall include the database information referenced in section B. It shall be the responsibility of each approved course provider to ensure that reasonable measures, such as the Payment Card Industry (PCI) data security measures, are taken to protect any acquired student data. Further, such data shall not be sold or otherwise used in any way except for the student's own completion of a boating safety education course and issuance of course completion documents.*

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-701, 29.1-735, and 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 24, Issue 23, eff. July 1, 2008.

4VAC15-410-80. ~~Recordkeeping and student records.~~ (REPEALED)

~~A. The department shall maintain a database of all students successfully completing the department's classroom-based boating safety education course and all persons successfully completing the equivalency exam. Such database shall include, but not be limited to, student name, address, date of birth, course/equivalency exam completion date, and the specific name of the course. On a schedule and in a manner mutually agreed to through a cooperative agreement, each approved course provider for other classroom-based boating safety education courses shall provide to the department a copy of the record of those students successfully completing such course and the department may add this information to the student database. A change in student address will be made only upon receipt of a written request from the affected student.~~

~~B. Each approved course provider for boating safety education courses offered over the Internet or through an electronic format such as CD-ROM shall maintain a database of all students successfully completing such course. The database shall include, but not be limited to, student name, address, date of birth, course completion date, and the specific name of the course. On a schedule and in a manner mutually agreed to through a cooperative agreement, each approved course provider shall provide to the department a copy of the record of those students successfully completing their course. Such record shall include the database information referenced in this section. It shall be the responsibility of each approved course provider to ensure that reasonable measures, such as the Payment Card Industry (PCI) data security measures, are taken to protect any acquired student data. Further, such data shall not be sold or otherwise used in any way except for the student's own completion of a boating safety education course and issuance of course completion documents.~~

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-701, 29.1-735, and 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 24, Issue 23, eff. July 1, 2008.

4VAC15-410-90. Instructor certification.

A. To be certified as a boating safety education course instructor for the department's classroom-based boating safety education course, a person shall have successfully completed a classroom-based boating safety education course and be certified as an instructor by the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, or the United States Power Squadrons®, or the National Safe Boating Council, or another certification program accepted by the department.

B. Applicants for certified instructor shall submit an application to the department on a form and in a manner determined by the state boating law administrator. ~~At a minimum, the application shall include:~~

~~1. The applicant's name;~~

~~2. The applicant's street address;~~

~~3. The applicant's telephone number;~~

~~4. The applicant's email address, if any;~~

~~5. Information describing the applicant's experience and training in boating safety and seamanship and proof of completion of a NASBLA-approved boating safety education course; and~~

~~6. Any other information deemed necessary after review of the initial application.~~

C. Applicants may be required to submit a written consent for a criminal history background check in a manner determined by the Law Enforcement Division of the department.

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-701, 29.1-735, and 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 24, Issue 23, eff. July 1, 2008.

4VAC15-410-100. Provisions for open-book tests for classroom courses.

A. A boating safety education course offered in a classroom setting by either the department or an approved course provider shall offer the student the option of taking the end-of-course exam either closed-book or open-book. The minimum standards for boating safety education course competency shall be as provided for in 4VAC15-410-40 B 1 and 2.

~~B. In taking the exam open-book, the student may use the course text, instructor handouts, any related course material, and any personal notes taken during the class instruction to assist in the completion of the exam. The exam must be completed in a single session with a time limit not to exceed two hours.~~

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-701, 29.1-735, and 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 24, Issue 23, eff. July 1, 2008.

4VAC15-410-110. Equivalency exam criteria.

A. The department shall develop and make available a written equivalency exam to test the knowledge of information included in the curriculum of a boating safety education course. ~~Such exam shall provide experienced and knowledgeable boaters with the opportunity to meet the boating safety education compliance requirement set forth in § 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia without having to take and successfully complete a boating safety education course.~~

B. The equivalency exam shall be proctored by an individual(s) specifically designated by the department. The use of reference materials shall not be allowed while the exam is being administered and the exam shall be completed in a single session with a time limit not to exceed three hours. A person who fails an equivalency exam the second time is required to complete a NASBLA approved boating safety education course that is accepted by the department.

~~A. The equivalency exam shall be comprised of no less than 75 nor more than 100 exam questions and a minimum score of at least 80% shall be considered passing. Upon successful completion, an exam certificate and/or card shall be issued to the person completing the exam.~~

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-103, 29.1-501, 29.1-502, 29.1-701, and 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 24, Issue 23, eff. July 1, 2008; amended, Virginia Register Volume 29, Issue 9, eff. January 1, 2013.

4VAC15-410-130. Temporary operator's certificate.

A. The registered owner(s) of a motorboat or personal watercraft, if the boat is new or was sold with a transfer of ownership, shall be issued with the certificate of number for the motorboat or personal watercraft a temporary operator's certificate that shall allow the owner(s) to operate such boat in Virginia for 90 days. *A temporary operator's certificate shall not be renewable.*

~~B. A temporary operator's certificate shall be issued by the department, by any person authorized by the director to act as an agent to issue a certificate of number pursuant to § 29.1-706 of the Code of Virginia, or by a license agent of the department authorized to issue a temporary registration certificate for a motorboat. A temporary operator's certificate shall not be renewable.~~

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-701, 29.1-735, and 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 24, Issue 23, eff. July 1, 2008.

4VAC15-410-140. Virginia Boater Education Cards.

A. The department may establish an optional long-lasting and durable Virginia Boater Education Card for issuance to persons who can show that they have met the minimum standard of boating safety education course competency or who possesses a valid license to operate a vessel issued to maritime personnel by the United States Coast Guard or a marine certificate issued by the Canadian government or possesses a Canadian Pleasure Craft Operator's Card or possesses a commercial fisherman registration pursuant to § 28.2-241 of the Code of Virginia.

B. To obtain an optional Virginia Boater Education Card, a person must provide to the department:
   1. A completed application on a form provided by the department. ~~The application shall require the applicant's name, current mailing address, and date of birth.~~ The applicant must also sign a statement declaring that statements made on the form are true and correct and that all documents submitted with the form are true and correct copies of documents issued to the applicant. Incomplete applications will be returned to the applicant~~;~~.
   2. A copy of the documentation ~~(such as the boating safety education course completion certificate/wallet card or equivalency exam completion certificate/card)~~ that indicates that the minimum standards for boating safety education course competency have been met. Such documents must contain the name of the individual applying for the Virginia Boater Education Card. The department may require the applicant to provide the original document in the event that the copy submitted with the application is illegible or if the authenticity of the copy is not certain.

C. Upon receipt by the applicant, the optional Virginia Boater Education Card will serve in lieu of any other certificates or cards that have been issued to the bearer as a result of meeting the minimum standards for boating safety education course competency. As such, the Virginia Boater Education Card will not be transferable or revocable and will have no expiration date.

~~D. A person may apply, on a form provided by the department, for a replacement Virginia Boater Education Card. A replacement card may be issued if the original card is lost, stolen or destroyed, if misinformation is printed on the card, or if the bearer has legally changed their name. The application shall include an affidavit stating the circumstances that led to the need for replacement of the original card.~~

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-103, 29.1-501, 29.1-502, 29.1-701, and 29.1-735.2 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 24, Issue 23, eff. July 1, 2008; amended, Virginia Register Volume 29, Issue 9, eff. January 1, 2013.

**Virginia Administrative Code**
**Title 4. Conservation And Natural Resources**
**Agency 15. Department of Wildlife Resources**
**Chapter 430. Watercraft: Safety Equipment Requirements**

4VAC15-430-60. Personal flotation device condition; size and fit; approval marking.

It shall be unlawful to use a recreational vessel unless each PFD required by 4VAC15-430-30 or allowed by 4VAC15-430-40 is:

1. In serviceable condition as provided in 4VAC15-430-70;

2. Of an appropriate size and fit for the intended wearer, as marked on the approval label;

3. Legibly marked with its U.S. Coast Guard approval number; and

~~4. Used in accordance with any requirements or restrictions on the approval label.~~

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-501, 29.1-502, 29.1-701, 29.1-701.1 and 29.1-735 of the Code of Virginia.
Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 19, Issue 5, eff. January 1, 2003; amended, Virginia Register Volume 22, Issue 6, eff. March 1, 2006.

4VAC15-430-150. Ventilation.

*No person shall operate a boat built after July 31, 1980, that has a gasoline engine for electrical generation, mechanical power, or propulsion unless it is equipped with an operable ventilation system that meets the requirements of 33 CFR 183.610 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), and (f) and 183.620 (a) as established by the U.S. Coast Guard.*

~~A. All motorboats or motor vessels, except open boats and as provided in subsections D and E of this section, the construction or decking over of which is commenced after April 25, 1940, and which use fuel having a flashpoint of 110ºF, or less, shall have at least two ventilator ducts, fitted with cowls or their equivalent, for the efficient removal of explosive or flammable gases from the bilges of every engine and fuel tank compartment. There shall be at least one exhaust duct installed so as to extend from the open atmosphere to the lower portion of the bilge and at least one intake duct installed so as to extend to a point at least midway to the bilge or at least below the level of the carburetor air intake. The cowls shall be located and trimmed for maximum effectiveness and in such a manner so as to prevent displaced fumes from being recirculated.~~

~~B. As used in this section, the term open boats means those motorboats or motor vessels with all engine and fuel tank compartments, and other spaces to which explosive or flammable gases and vapors from these compartments may flow, open to the atmosphere and so arranged as to prevent the entrapment of such gases and vapors within the vessel.~~

~~C. Vessels built after July 31, 1980, which are manufactured or used primarily for noncommercial use; which are leased, rented, or chartered to another for the latter's noncommercial use; which are engaged in the carriage of six or fewer passengers for consideration; or which are in compliance with the requirements of the U.S. Coast Guard are exempted from these requirements.~~

~~D. Vessels built after July 31, 1978, which are manufactured or used primarily for noncommercial use; which are rented, leased, or chartered to another for the latter's noncommercial use; or which engage in conveying six or fewer passengers for consideration are exempted from the requirements of subsection A of this section for fuel tank compartments that:~~

~~1. Contain a permanently installed fuel tank if each electrical component is ignition protected; and~~

~~2. Contain fuel tanks that vent to the outside of the boat.~~

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-501, 29.1-502, 29.1-701, and 29.1-735 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 19, Issue 5, eff. January 1, 2003.

4VAC15-430-160. Fire extinguishing equipment application and general provisions.

A. The provisions of this section through 4VAC15-430-210, with the exception of 4VAC15-430-200, shall apply to all vessels contracted for on or after November 19, 1952. Vessels contracted for prior to that date shall meet the requirements of 4VAC15-430-200.

B. Where equipment in this section is required to be of an approved type, such equipment requires the specific approval of the U.S. Coast Guard. A listing of current and formerly approved equipment and materials may be found at *https://cgmix.uscg.mil/equipment* ~~https://cgmix.uscg.mil/%u200Bequipment~~ .

C. All hand-portable fire extinguishers, semiportable fire extinguishing systems, and fixed fire extinguishing systems shall be of a type approved by the U.S. Coast Guard and shall have an efficient charge and be in good and serviceable condition as referenced in 4VAC15-430-170.

Statutory Authority

§§29.1-501, 29.1-502, 29.1-701, 29.1-701.1, and 29.1-735 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 19, Issue 5, eff. January 1, 2003; amended, Virginia Register Volume 22, Issue 6, eff. March 1, 2006; Volume 39, Issue 9, eff. January 1, 2023.

4VAC15-430-170. Hand-portable fire extinguishers and semiportable fire extinguishing systems.

A. Hand-portable fire extinguishers and semiportable fire extinguishing systems are classified by a combination letter and number symbol, the letter indicating the type of fire that the unit could be expected to extinguish, and the number indicating the relative size of the unit.
B. For the purpose of this section, all required hand-portable fire extinguishers and semiportable fire extinguishing systems are of the "B" type; that is, suitable for extinguishing fires involving flammable liquids, greases, etc.
C. All fire extinguishers must be on board and readily accessible, in good and serviceable working condition, and comply with the following:
    1. If the extinguisher has a pressure gauge reading or indicator, it must be in the operable range or position.
    2. The extinguisher may not be expired or appear to have been previously used.
    3. The lock pin is firmly in place.
    4. The discharge nozzle is clean and free of obstruction.
    5. The extinguisher does not show visible signs of significant corrosion or damage.

~~D. All hand-portable fire extinguishers and semiportable fire extinguishing systems shall have permanently attached thereto a metallic name plate giving the name of the item, the rated capacity in gallons, quarts, or pounds, the name and address of the person or firm for whom approved, and the identifying mark of the actual manufacturer.~~

~~E.~~ *D.* Vaporizing-liquid type fire extinguishers containing carbon tetrachloride or chlorobromomethane or other toxic vaporizing liquids are not acceptable as equipment required by this section.

~~F.~~ *E.* Hand-portable or semiportable extinguishers that are required on their name plates to be protected from freezing shall not be located where freezing temperatures may be expected.

~~G.~~ *F.* The use of dry chemical, stored pressure, fire extinguishers not fitted with pressure gauges or indicating devices, manufactured prior to January 1, 1965, may be permitted on motorboats and other vessels so long as such extinguishers are maintained in good and serviceable condition. The following maintenance and inspections are required for such extinguishers:

1. When the date on the inspection record tag on the extinguishers shows that six months have elapsed since last weight check ashore, then such extinguisher is no longer accepted as meeting required maintenance conditions until reweighed ashore and found to be in a serviceable condition and within required weight conditions.

2. If the weight of the container is one-fourth ounce less than that stamped on container, it shall be serviced.

3. If the outer seals ( that indicate tampering or use when broken) are not intact, the boarding officer or marine inspector will inspect such extinguisher to see that the frangible disc in neck of the container is intact; and if such disc is not intact, the container shall be serviced.

4. If there is evidence of damage, use, or leakage, such as dry chemical powder observed in the nozzle or elsewhere on the extinguisher, the container shall be replaced with a new one

and the extinguisher properly serviced or the extinguisher replaced with another approved extinguisher.

~~H.~~ *G.* The dry chemical, stored pressure, fire extinguishers without pressure gauges or indicating devices manufactured after January 1, 1965, shall not be carried on board motorboats or other vessels as required equipment.

Statutory Authority

§§29.1-501, 29.1-502, 29.1-701, and 29.1-735 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 19, Issue 5, eff. January 1, 2003; amended, Virginia Register Volume 39, Issue 9, eff. January 1, 2023.

4VAC15-430-210. Backfire flame control.

*Every engine, except outboard motors, using gasoline as fuel and installed in a vessel shall be equipped with an acceptable means of backfire flame control that meets the requirements of 46 CFR 25.35.*

~~A. Every gasoline engine installed in a motorboat or motor vessel after April 25, 1940, except outboard motors, shall be equipped with an acceptable means of backfire flame control.~~

~~B. Installations made before November 19, 1952, may be continued in use as long as they are serviceable and in good condition. Replacements shall comply with any applicable standards established by the U.S. Coast Guard and be marked accordingly. The flame arrester must be suitably secured to the air intake with a flametight connection.~~

~~C. Installations consisting of backfire flame arresters bearing basic approval nos. 162.015 or 162.041 or engine air and fuel induction systems bearing basic approval nos. 162.015 or 162.042 may be continued in use as long as they are serviceable and in good condition. New installations or replacements must comply with any applicable standards established by the U.S. Coast Guard and be marked accordingly. The flame arrester must be suitably secured to the air intake with a flametight connection.~~

Statutory Authority

§§ 29.1-501, 29.1-502, 29.1-701, and 29.1-735 of the Code of Virginia.

Historical Notes

Derived from Virginia Register Volume 19, Issue 5, eff. January 1, 2003; Errata 19:14 VA.R. 2176, 2177 March 24, 2003.

Chapter 400. Watercraft: Accident and Casualty Reporting

FORMS (4VAC15-400). AMEND

*Virginia Boating Incident Report*

~~Crossbow Application (rev. 7/22/96). Virginia state resident hunting license.~~

~~Special application for domicile resident licenses and permits to hunt, fish or trap in Virginia. Resident bear-deer-turkey hunting license.~~

~~Resident bonus deer permit.~~

~~Virginia nonresident bear-deer-turkey hunting license. Nonresident bonus deer permit.~~

~~Nonresident 3 day trip hunting license. Virginia national forest hunting permit. Nonresident hunting license.~~

~~Resident junior hunting license.~~

~~Virginia county or city resident hunting license. State resident muzzleloading hunting license.~~

~~Resident junior bear-deer-turkey license. Resident 65-and-older hunting license.~~

~~Resident archery hunting license. Nonresident archery hunting license. Stationary blind hunting permit.~~

~~Floating blind hunting permit. Nonresident shooting preserve license.~~

~~Nonresident muzzleloading hunting license.~~

~~DGIF license sales agent hunting certificates sales report.~~

~~Application for state resident disabled veteran's lifetime state license to hunt and fish in inland waters (eff. 5/01).~~

~~Resident disabled veteran's permanent state license to hunt and fish.~~

~~Permit for persons permanently unable to walk to shoot from a stationary vehicle, LAW-28A (eff. 8/94).~~

~~Physician's affirmation as to one's permanent inability to walk. State resident license to trap.~~

~~Virginia county or city residence license to trap. State resident age 65-and-older license to trap. Nonresident trapping license.~~

~~Resident fresh water fishing license. Resident fishing license renewal application.~~

~~State non-resident fresh water fishing license. County or city resident fresh water fishing license. State resident trout fresh water fishing license.~~

~~State non-resident trout fresh water fishing license. National forest certificate.~~

~~State non-resident fresh water 5-day fishing license. 65 and over state resident fresh water fishing license. State resident fresh water 5-day fishing license.~~

~~Individual saltwater sport fishing license. Temporary 10-day saltwater sport fishing license. Saltwater boat sport fishing license.~~

~~Fishing certificates sales report, #79-F1 (eff. 1/95).~~

~~Application for disabled resident special lifetime hunting, fresh water, or saltwater fishing license. (eff. 6/93).~~

~~Disabled resident hunting and fresh water fishing license physicians' affidavit. Disabled resident special lifetime fishing license.~~

~~Disabled resident special lifetime fishing and hunting license.~~

~~Application for lifetime hunting and/or lifetime fresh water fishing licenses. (eff. 10/94). Resident special lifetime hunting and fishing license.~~

~~Resident special lifetime hunting license. Resident special lifetime fishing license. Non-resident lifetime fishing license.~~

~~Non-resident lifetime hunting license.~~

~~Non-resident hunting, fresh water, saltwater recreational fishing license order form. (eff. 10/94). Nonresident application for permit to deal in furs.~~

~~Annual raw fur dealer's report. (eff. 6/94). Nonresident permit to deal in furs.~~

~~Resident application for permit to deal in furs. (eff. 6/94). Resident application to deal in furs.~~

~~Application for field trial permit. (eff. 8/94). Raccoon hound field trial permit conditions.~~

~~Application for establishing a licensed shooting preserve. (eff. 7/94) Shooting preserve annual report.~~

~~Striped bass fishing tournament data sheet.~~

~~Competitive freshwater fishing tournament notice. (eff. 7/1/93). Competitive freshwater fishing tournament data summary.~~

~~Special guest fishing license application. Nonresident complimentary fishing license. Special guest fishing license.~~

~~Application for Virginia freshwater fish citation. (eff. 8/1/93). Fish stocking permit (to stock fish in Virginia inland waters).~~

~~Application for authorization to establish a regulated trout fishing preserve. (eff. 2/7/94). Trout fishing preserve annual report.~~

~~Application for enrollment in the community fishing clinics program. Application for fallow deer farming permit. (eff. 6/94).~~

~~Deer management assistance program application.~~

~~Official kill permit, to kill wild animals during closed season. (eff. 5/93).~~

~~Request for certification in the Virginia DGIF wildlife habitat program. (eff. 6/94).~~

~~Application for permit to stuff and mount birds, animals or fish and parts thereof for sale or compensation.~~

~~Permit to stuff or mount birds, animals, or fish.~~

~~Application for scientific collection or salvage permit (to collect fish or wildlife for scientific purposes or salvage fish or wildlife for scientific or educational purposes).~~

~~Scientific collection/salvage permit supplemental amendment form. Application for Virginia endangered species permit.~~

~~Non-native (exotic) animal permit. Application for wolf-hybrid permit. (eff. 6/94). Application/permit wildlife rehabilitator.~~

~~Application/permit to propagate for private use certain game and migratory game birds.~~

~~Brood stock reports (species, number, and origin of brood stock for certain game and migratory game birds).~~

~~Application/permit to propagate and sell certain wildlife.~~

~~Brood stock report (species, number, and origin of brood stock for certain amphibians and reptiles).~~

~~Annual reporting form for propagating and selling certain wildlife (permitted tilapia, frogs, snakes, game birds, game animals, and furbearers).~~

~~Application/permit to exhibit wild animals.~~

~~Application/permit to import certain non-native (exotic) wildlife into Virginia.~~

~~Application/permit to hold and sell certain fish, snakes, snapping turtles, crayfish, and hellgrammites for sale.~~

~~Annual reporting form for propagating certain wildlife for private use.~~

~~Exotic species application/permit to import certified triploid grass carp for aquatic vegetation control in private ponds.~~

~~Application for motorboat certificate of number/certificate of title, #BRT10/94-100M. Affidavit covering repossession of vessel title number.~~

~~Application for marine event.~~

~~Application to transfer saltwater recreational boat license.~~

~~Application for duplicate certificate of (watercraft) title, #BC/DCT9/93-2M. Boating education notice/course application.~~

~~Statement of authorization to add or delete a (boat) purchaser(s).~~

~~Affidavit of compliance for enforcement of liens on vessels under a judicial order (appraised value of $3001 and over).~~

~~Affidavit of compliance for enforcement of liens on vessels under a judicial order (appraised value of $3000 or less).~~

~~(Boat) length certificate affidavit.~~

~~Affidavit of authority to transfer registration/title of a watercraft; procedure to transfer a Virginia certificate of title/registration when watercraft owner is deceased.~~

~~Procedure to acquire title/registration on an abandoned vessel; affidavit; sample letter; sample notice.~~

~~Statement of missing title and assignment of title to a vessel, SMT-3/94-2M. Stolen boat, motor, and trailer report.~~

~~Application for supplemental lien or transfer of lien.~~

~~Affidavit for transfer when watercraft certificate of title is lost, etc. (eff. 4/89).~~

~~Affidavit for transfer of certificate of number (registration) when bill of sale is not available from last registered owner. (eff. 4/89).~~

~~Application for establishment of regulatory markers on public waters of Virginia. (Public boating landing) Special use permit.~~

4VAC15-20-120. Appointment of new consignment agents for sale of hunting and fishing licenses. **(REPEAL)**

~~A. Except as provided below, no person shall be appointed as a consignment agent for the sale of hunting and fishing licenses unless he first sells licenses on a cash basis for at least one year. In addition, the dollar volume of actual or projected sales must equal at least 90% of the average hunting and fishing license sales of consignment agents in the locality.~~

~~B. If the cash agent sells the required number of licenses, he may be appointed as a consignment agent, provided he is approved for a surety bond by the board's bonding company.~~

~~C. This chapter is applicable to new appointments and not to transfers of existing appointments; provided, that the director may appoint consignment agents as needed to provide for a minimum of two consignment agents within a locality. In addition, the director may appoint consignment agents on state-owned or state-leased facilities.~~

# VIRGINIA WILD TURKEY MANAGEMENT PLAN

2025-2034


2025

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

## Executive Summary

Wild turkeys, once pushed to the brink of extinction, represent one of North America's landmark conservation success stories. Today's healthy wild turkey populations provide many benefits for hunters, outdoor recreationists, and the general public, but may also foster concerns for crop damage, vehicle collisions, or conflicts within residential neighborhoods. Concerns over turkey populations have risen over the past several years which provides some uncertainty and challenges for future management. With varied public values and opinions about wild turkeys (even among hunters), turkey management continues to provide challenges for the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (VDWR) in their mission to *Conserve, Connect, and Protect*. Optimum turkey populations will balance positive demands (e.g., hunting, viewing) with negative demands (e.g., agricultural damage, other conflicts).

Embodying the interests of all citizens, the first Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan (2013-2022) was developed using a stakeholder involvement process to reflect the values of a diverse public about what should be accomplished with turkey management in Virginia. A similar approach was undertaken for this revision of the turkey management plan. Public stakeholders interested in turkeys made value choices about turkey management, while wildlife professionals focused on technical and biological aspects. While considering technical background information from VDWR staff from throughout Virginia, a citizen Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) met three times to develop the goals and objectives found in the Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan. The SAC, initially comprised of 18 individuals from key stakeholder groups, represented various turkey-related interests from across the state, including private landowners, public land managers, sporting interests (e.g., fall hunters, spring hunters), non-governmental organizations, recreational interests, and agricultural producers.

The Turkey Technical Committee, involving VDWR staff with technical expertise in turkey management, provided scientific and technical information. In addition to providing technical feedback to the SAC, the Turkey Technical Committee also focused on identifying the objectives and potential strategies to achieve the goals drafted by the SAC.

The Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan contains four sections: History, Demand, Accomplishments of the Previous Plan, and the Values, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies. The technical portion (History and Demand Sections) describes wild turkey management history, life history and biology, and status (supply and demand) in Virginia. The accomplishments of the previous plan section provide an assessment of VDWR's progress towards meeting goals and objectives outlined in the previous management plan. The Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan includes an overarching mission statement for managing turkeys and four goal areas that address populations, habitat, recreation, and human-turkey conflict. Specific objectives were developed to help guide the attainment of each goal. Potential strategies suggest ways that each objective might be achieved.

Turkey Plan Mission Statement:

*Sustainably manage wild turkey populations as a wild, free-roaming public trust resource in a manner that serves the needs and interests of the citizens of the Commonwealth.*

*Manage wild turkey populations, turkey habitat, turkey-related recreation, and human-turkey conflicts, using biologically sound, applied science-based approaches that:*

- *are ethical;*
- *are flexible, innovative, and cost effective;*
- *are proactive;*
- *are publicly accepted (i.e. informed acceptance);*
- *have impacts at relevant scales (local, region, state);*
- *are accountable and transparent;*
- *are collaborative with other agencies, partners, and the public; and,*
- *are holistic, considering consequences on other species and stakeholders.*

The specific goals address:

Populations: *Manage turkey populations at levels adaptable to changing landscapes that balance the varied needs and expectations of stakeholders statewide and locally. The use of regulated hunting and active habitat management should be the primary population management tools while acknowledging that other management tools may be employed depending upon localized objectives or limiting factors.*

Habitat: *Manage turkey habitat compatible with turkey population, recreation, and conflict goals while working across diverse public and private land ownerships and ecosystems. Habitat conservation actions should consist of practices that benefit multiple species with an emphasis on areas of special significance to the life history of turkeys (e.g., nesting or brood rearing habitat) while also considering potential impacts of other landscape changes (e.g., land use or climate impacts).*

Recreation: *Provide and promote various forms of wild turkey-related recreation to optimize quality opportunities (i.e. safe, responsible, ethical, lawful, and accessible). Preserve the heritage and tradition of hunting turkeys (fall and spring), and provide opportunities to observe turkeys, for both management and recreational benefits. Turkey related recreational opportunities should not prevent the attainment of population objectives.*

Conflict: *Prevent and reduce human-wild turkey conflicts (e.g., agricultural, residential, recreational, airport) while:*

- *promoting shared responsibility (personal, community, agency)*
- *fostering practices that keep turkeys wild*
- *prioritizing use of nonlethal methods to resolve conflicts,*
- *using regulated hunting as the preferred method when lethal alternatives are required to manage conflicts,*
- *attaining turkey population, habitat, and recreation goals.*

This second Wild Turkey Management Plan intends to build off the success of the first plan, guiding management direction and providing clarity to management strategies that VDWR and partners should employ to achieve lasting success for turkey management. The Plan

identifies generally what, when, and how turkey projects are implemented and will provide guidance to the VDWR Board of Directors, VDWR administrators and staff, and the public on turkey program priorities, management activities, hunting regulations, and annual budgeting for the next 10 years. It is important to emphasize that (1) the Plan is strategic rather than operational, and (2) turkey management is the shared responsibility of DWR, other agencies, partners, and the public.

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# INTRODUCTION

As a symbol of nature's bounty from the first Thanksgiving, wild turkeys are widely recognized by people throughout North America. After wild turkeys were pushed to the brink of extinction in the early 1900s, the restoration of this cultural icon represents one of North America's landmark wildlife management success stories. Today's healthy wild turkey populations provide many benefits for hunters, outdoor recreationists, and the general public. However, abundant populations can also foster concerns about crop damage or neighborhood nuisances. With the varied public values and opinions about wild turkeys (even among hunters), turkey management has created complex and unique challenges for the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (VDWR).

The VDWR, under the direction of a Governor-appointed Board of Directors, is charged specifically by the General Assembly with the management of the state's wildlife resources. The Code of Virginia expresses many legal mandates for the Board and VDWR, prominent among which are management of wildlife species (§29.1-103), public education (§29.1-109), law enforcement (§29.1-109), and regulations (§29.1-501). To help clarify and interpret the role of VDWR in managing wildlife in Virginia, the Board of Directors has adopted the following Agency mission statement:

- **Conserve** and manage wildlife populations and habitat for the benefit of present and future generations.
- **Connect** people to Virginia's outdoors through boating, education, fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, and other wildlife-related activities.
- **Protect** people and property by promoting safe outdoor experiences and managing human-wildlife conflicts.

To accomplish the mission of the VDWR, the Board of Wildlife Resources provided further guidance in goals (see Mission, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies section of this plan).

## What is the Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan?

The Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan *is a strategic plan* that is only intended to provide overall directions, goals, and objectives for the wild turkey program (e.g., to increase turkey populations in a specific county). As such, *it is not an operational plan* where the specific details of potential strategies to carry out objectives are exactly described (e.g., establishing the specific hunting season dates).

The Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan describes the history of wild turkeys and their management in Virginia, the current status of wild turkeys (supply and demand), and future management directions. The plan establishes a framework through 2034 for what needs to be done for turkey management and how it should be done. By clarifying management goals and objectives of the VDWR relating to turkeys, this plan will help Board members, VDWR administrators, VDWR staff, and the public to effectively address wild turkey management issues. As the basis for guiding turkey management activities, decisions, and projects, the plan also informs the General Assembly and the public of what the VDWR intends to accomplish.

## How the Plan was Developed

Because VDWR's mission is to serve the people of the Commonwealth, the process used to develop this plan incorporated both public values (e.g., economic, sociological, and political) and biological considerations. During the planning process, public stakeholders focused on the public values regarding wild turkeys, whereas wildlife management professionals focused on the technical aspects of wild turkey management.

VDWR's first statewide plan was developed in 2013 to fulfill its mandate to manage wild turkeys in Virginia. The 10-year plan represented the turkey-related interests of all citizens, not just select groups of people. Diverse stakeholders representing public landowners, sporting interests, non-consumptive interests, and agricultural producers contributed toward this end. To identify important issues in wild turkey management, a series of nine focus group meetings were conducted throughout Virginia to begin the planning process. The issues identified by focus group participants provided a starting point for Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) discussions. The SAC, initially composed of 13 representatives from key stakeholder groups, was tasked with developing draft goals that reflect public values to guide wild turkey management. A Wild Turkey Technical Committee (Technical Committee), composed of VDWR (then VDGIF) biologists with expertise on wild turkey management, was formed to provide scientific information and technical feedback to the SAC. The Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation in the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech provided the overall guidance and administrative support for the planning approach and processes. To broaden input and to ensure that the work of the SAC accurately reflected the values of the Commonwealth's citizens, the public was provided an opportunity to provide input during six public meetings and online review of the draft plan. The final draft of the Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan was presented to the VDWR Board of Directors for their review and endorsement at the January 28, 2014, Board Meeting.

The process used to revise the current plan (2025-2034) was similar to the initial planning effort, but without focus groups, public input meetings, or consultation with an external facilitator. However, this revision incorporated additional input from turkey hunters on the front end with a survey in the fall of 2023 conducted by DWR's human dimensions team. As before, a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC; Appendix A) and Technical Committee (TC; Appendix B) were important contributors, along with the DWR wild turkey program consisting of the Forest Game Bird Biologist, the Deer-Bear-Turkey Biologist, and Forest Wildlife Program Manager. The SAC, representing a cross section of wild turkey-related interests (e.g., different types of hunters, agricultural producers, conservation organizations, tribal interests, and other natural resources management agencies), was responsible for identifying the goals and prioritizing the outcomes for turkey management. The Technical Committee, composed of DWR staff with technical expertise in turkey management, drafted objectives and strategies based on values identified by the SAC. The VDWR Board of Wildlife Resources endorsed the 2025-34 Plan on May 22, 2025

## Plan Format

The Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan includes sections relating to the life history of wild turkeys, the wild turkey program history in Virginia, Virginia's wild turkey program status (supply and demand), and accomplishments of the 2013 plan. Within the context of the VDWR mission statement, the four program goals focus on wild turkey populations, turkey habitat, turkey-related recreation, and human-turkey conflicts. Specific objectives have been established to help guide the attainment of these goals, with potential strategies clarifying how each objective might be achieved.

**Interim Changes to the Plan**

The Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan is designed to provide guidance and priorities to help manage Virginia's turkey program through 2034. A plan life of 10 years was chosen for several reasons: goals should remain relatively constant over that time, a mechanism exists for interim changes in objectives and strategies, and limitations in staff and resources preclude more frequent revisions. However, a plan should be a dynamic and flexible tool that remains responsive to changing social, environmental, technical, and administrative conditions. To keep the plan relevant and responsive to the programmatic goal directions provided by the public, specific objectives and strategies may be added, deleted, or amended by VDWR as new circumstances demand. As adaptive changes in management approaches (i.e., objectives) are necessary, VDWR will submit interim updates to the SAC for review before implementing changes; updated objectives will be provided as addenda to the Plan on the VDWR website.

**Acknowledgements**

The meaningful involvement of stakeholders (some of whom participated in the development of the original turkey plan) from throughout the Commonwealth was crucial to the successful representation of the turkey related interests and public values of all Virginians. The commitment of time and dedication provided by the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (Appendix A) not only made a substantial difference in the quality of the final plan, but also enriched the process throughout; we greatly appreciate their effort and dedication.

Appreciation is extended for the work of the Technical Committee (Appendix B) for reviewing and updating technical information and for providing their expertise along the way. Technical research and writing for the revised plan primarily were provided by Mike Dye and Katie Martin of VDWR. Appreciation is also extended to Rene Valdez and Mallory Gyovai White (VDWR human dimensions team) for developing and conducting a survey of turkey hunters during 2023. Scott Klopfer of Virginia Tech's Conservation Management Institute dedicated significant time and expertise to updating the turkey habitat suitability model.

Last but not least, we would like to extend our gratitude to all the individuals, whether public or agency staff, who took the time to respond to the 2023 turkey hunter survey and/or review the draft plan and provide constructive input in 2025.

# HISTORY

## LIFE HISTORY OF WILD TURKEYS

Two species of turkeys occur in North America. The wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) can be found in 49 states, 6 Canadian provinces, and Mexico. The ocellated turkey (*M. ocellata*) is limited to Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico. Five subspecies of the wild turkey, each with distinct biological characteristics and unique management requirements, are widely distributed across the continent (Fig. 1). The most common subspecies, and the subspecies found in Virginia, is the eastern wild turkey *(M. g. silvestris*). Although population approximations are very speculative, the population of wild turkeys in the United States and Canada has been estimated to be approximately 5 million birds.

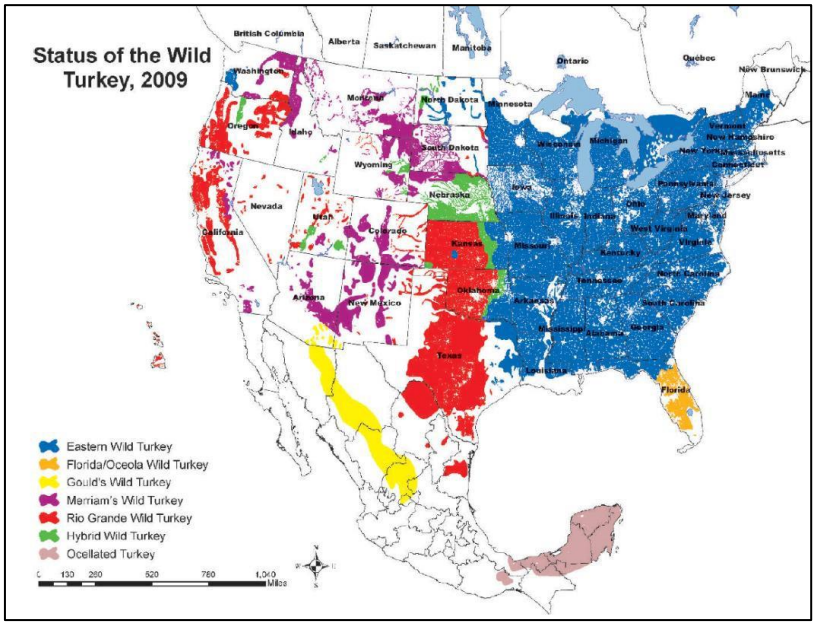


Figure 1. Distribution range of the wild turkey by species and subspecies (from Tapley et al. 2012).

### Physical Characteristics

Both sexes have iridescent feathers showing varying colors of red, green, copper, bronze, and gold. Age and sex can be distinguished by the coloration, shape, and contour of certain feathers. Compared to the chestnut-brown color of female (hen) breast feather tips, male (gobbler) breast feathers are typically black tipped which results in a darker appearance of gobblers compared to hens. Although uncommon, other variations in feather color may result in turkeys that appear black, red, or white. Males generally lack feathers on the head, while females have feathers that extend up to the back of the head. Especially during the mating season, skin on the heads of gobblers can be quite colorful with variable shades of whites, reds, and blues.

A prominent difference between male and female wild turkeys is the presence of a beard in gobblers. The beard is a group of bristles (modified feathers) that originate from the center of

the breast and grow throughout the bird's life. Beards generally begin to protrude from between the breast feathers at 6-7 months of age and are permanently attached, unlike feathers that are periodically replaced. While the beard can grow 3-5 inches per year, the total length may be limited by wear and breakage from dragging on the ground and from ice or snow damage. Gobbler beards in the first year are generally less than 6 inches in length, while two-year-old birds typically have beards that are 8-11 inches in length. The record beard length of an eastern wild turkey in Virginia is over 16 inches. Infrequently, turkeys may also have multiple beards; the highest number of beards reported to the VDWR has been 7 beards. A small proportion (5-10%) of adult females also possesses beards, but they are typically shorter (6-8 inches) and have fewer bristles than gobblers.

Unlike hens, gobblers possess spurs, which are used for fighting. The spur is located on the lower leg just above the foot and is made up of a bony core layered with keratin scales. As birds age, additional keratin scales are added contributing to the length of the spur. Historically, spur length was commonly used to assign ages in adult gobblers; however, more recent research suggests that individual variation in spur growth may cause this to be an inaccurate measure of age. Taken as a general rule of thumb, birds with spurs less than ½ inches by the spring are juveniles (i.e. born the previous spring). Birds with spurs between ½ and ¾ of an inch are commonly classified as two-year-old birds; gobblers with spurs longer than ¾ of an inch are typically three or more years old. Spurs over 2 inches are uncommon for the eastern subspecies. Infrequently, gobblers can have 2 spurs on each leg and even hens may rarely possess spurs.

Poults (young turkeys) weigh just a few ounces at hatching but gain weight quickly. Females generally weigh 4 to 7 pounds in their first year and typically weigh 8 to 11 pounds as adults. Adult males are heavier, weighing 17 to 21 pounds on average. Gould's and Rio Grande subspecies are typically the heaviest subspecies, with the Florida subspecies weighing the least. The current weight record for Virginia wild turkeys is 27.3 pounds.

Wild turkeys have a keen sense of vision, and they can easily detect movements and likely distinguish colors. With eyes on the sides of their head, wild turkeys have monocular vision that provides a wide field of view but little depth perception. To compensate for their lack of depth perception, turkeys frequently move their heads. Turkeys also have a remarkable ability to hear and locate sounds. Turkeys have a relatively poor sense of taste and smell.

Although wild turkeys typically prefer to walk rather than fly when feeding or traveling, they are capable of rapidly rising and flying short distances when disturbed. They can also travel longer distances in the air when the topography allows them to glide down-slope. Turkeys are estimated to run up to 12 miles per hour and fly up to 50 miles per hour.

**Food Habits**

Most of a wild turkey's life is spent in search of food. The quantity and availability of food affects condition, behavior, survival, hunting mortality rates, movements, reproduction, and population size. As evidenced by their wide distribution, a very flexible diet has helped the wild turkey adapt to many different habitats. Wild turkeys are opportunistic and omnivorous (eating both plant and animal matter) feeders with a diverse diet that generally reflects available foods. They have been documented to feed on more than 350 different plant species and 87 different insect species. Important plant foods include acorns, grasses, sedge leaves, roots, tubers, stems,

buds, and leaves. Other important foods include wild grapes, beechnuts, dogwood berries, and sumac fruits. Acorns are an especially important food for wild turkeys and, when available, are preferred over most other natural foods; smaller acorns are preferred over larger varieties.

Poults (< 2 months of age) subsist on a diet of insects that provide high protein and energy needed for rapid growth of feathers. Important insect groups include beetles, grasshoppers, and leafhoppers. The percentage of insects in the diet of young turkeys declines through the summer as their diet changes to more herbaceous leaves, berries, and fruits. Turkeys also will use agricultural areas, row crops, and openings to obtain food.

Especially at the higher elevations of western Virginia, deep snows can limit the availability of wintertime foods. Wild turkeys have the ability to scratch through 12 inches of snow, but snow depths above 4 inches can limit their access to food. Unless snow-covered areas become ice-packed, snow depths less than 4 inches have little impact on turkey feeding. When snow conditions are not favorable, turkeys will move into areas with pines, cedars, or other cover for shelter and foods. As spring approaches, spring seeps are an important source of early-emerging herbaceous plants. Even during years with mast failures and deep snows, turkeys are able to survive because of their flexible diet, fat reserves, and thermal protection provided by their feathers. Although they may lose up to 40% of their body weight, wild turkeys can still survive 2 weeks without food.

**Flocking Behavior**

Wild turkeys are social and live in flocks which are usually segregated by family units, age, and sex. During the summer, turkey flocks are usually composed of brood flocks (i.e., groups of hens and their young poults), made up from several different broods and hens (often unrelated hens), flocks of unsuccessful hens, and flocks of gobblers. During late fall, young males will leave the brood flocks to form their own juvenile male flock. Some birds in these flocks remain together for life. As a result, many flocks of adult wild turkeys are composed of same-sex siblings that were raised together in brood flocks.

The social organization within a flock, called a pecking order, is a linear hierarchy of dominance. The top-ranked bird, or alpha bird, is dominant over all others and the lowest-ranked, or omega bird, is submissive to all others. Within-flock pecking orders are determined by behavioral displays and fighting among individuals. Fighting for dominance begins in brood flocks during late summer and progresses into autumn. Once determined, the pecking order is stable and changes only with the death or serious injury of a flock member. Not only do pecking orders occur within flocks, but they also exist between flocks. The pecking order between flocks is usually determined simply by flock size, with smaller flocks yielding to larger ones. Males and females also have separate social orders. During early autumn there can be spectacular displays of fighting when several brood flocks come together.

**Home Range and Movements**

Home range is defined as the area occupied by an animal over a given period of time. All the life history requirements to reproduce and survive must be provided within a turkey's home range. Reflecting the dynamic nature of turkey habitat use, home range size and shifts in location can be highly variable due to habitat quality, food availability, sex, age, hunting pressure, season,

and reproductive status. On an annual basis, individual home range sizes may range from 3 to 13 square miles. With diverse habitats, turkey home range sizes in Virginia also vary widely. Research in the Shenandoah Valley showed home ranges that varied from 2.6 $mi^2$ to 13.2 $mi^2$ while turkeys at Fort Eustis in Newport News exhibited home range sizes of about 3 $mi^2$. Male turkeys usually have larger home ranges than female turkeys. Because turkeys seasonally move to other habitats, the home range used on an annual basis is larger than the home range being used within a specific season.

Marked by significant movements to explore new habitats during the fall and spring, juvenile turkeys typically have larger home range sizes than adults. In a West Virginia study of 315 hen turkeys from 1989-93, the annual home range size of adult hen turkeys (7.0 $mi^2$) was smaller than the home range for juvenile hens (20.4 $mi^2$). In general, home range size also tends to be larger during fall and winter than during spring and summer. However, during years with abundant acorn crops, the fall and winter home range sizes may be small because of the ease with which food can be found. Likewise, birds that are artificially fed by people have very small home ranges compared to turkeys foraging on natural foods. When acorns are scarce, turkey home range size increases. The greatest long-distance movement observed during Virginia turkey research was an adult female that travelled more than 50 air miles during a fall season with a mast failure.

The home range sizes of hens vary by age and reproductive status. In West Virginia, spring home range sizes of adult hens without broods (3.4 $mi^2$) were smaller than hens with broods (5.3 $mi^2$). In contrast, spring home range sizes of juvenile hens without broods were larger than those with broods. Seasonal shifts in home range are common, especially between winter and spring seasons, and between juvenile and adult turkeys. Winter-to-spring shifts in locations were smaller for adult females (1.2 miles) than for juvenile females (2.9 miles). On average, adult hens shifted successive spring home ranges by 0.5 miles, while juvenile shifts were 2.2 miles. Because 45% of adults and 62% of juvenile birds made substantial shifts in spring home range location between years, most hens do not use the same nesting location annually. However, some hens will return to the same general nesting location between years.

**Habitat Requirements**

The habitat required to support wild turkey populations within their home range must meet all the food, cover, space, and water needs throughout the year for all ages and sexes. The best turkey habitats offer a mosaic of forest patches with a diversity of options for feeding, reproducing, and surviving. In general, ideal habitats are made up of many different forest age classes interspersed with openings and/or open or agricultural lands that comprise 10-50% of the area. Turkeys often take advantage of farming operations where they feed on waste corn, grains, and insects attracted to agricultural crops.

A variety of different ages of timber will provide a diversity of foods and other habitat needs for wild turkeys. Timber rotation ages between 80-120 years create timber stands with an

assortment of ages. Timber rotation refers to the number of years it takes to grow a tree to maturity. With a rotation age of 100 years, an average of 1% of the forest area would be regenerated each year by harvesting the oldest trees. A timber rotation of 100 years results in 10% of the area being less than 10 years old and 50% would be greater than 50 years old. Older-aged timber stands, particularly those that have trees producing hard mast like acorns, provide important foods for energy and protein that contribute to over-winter survival and condition. Although only briefly available, younger-aged stands (1-5 years old) provide good brood habitat for cover and insects. Young timber stands also provide a variety of soft mast-producing shrubs plants, such as blackberry, that are particularly important during years of mast failures. Substantial hard mast production does not occur until timber stands reach 50 years old. Although a necessary stage of sound forest management, timber stands between 20-50 years of age are of lesser value to wild turkeys.

Especially in northern hardwoods and high elevations in western Virginia, conifer cover (e.g., pines, cedars) provides an important roosting habitat for wintering birds. Turkeys frequently use these areas to provide thermal protection and some fruits and seeds. Spring seeps are another important habitat type when snow covers the ground. Spring seeps are places where ground water comes to the surface. At a constant temperature of about 50-60 degrees Fahrenheit, ground water in seeps melt away snow which provides feeding areas rich in insects and herbaceous vegetation.

Of particular importance are the habitats that provide adequate nesting and brood-rearing opportunities. Wild turkey hens can nest in almost any forest stand, but nest sites are generally selected in early successional habitats with dense herbaceous and shrub cover at ground level. Hens may select nest sites in recently cut forest stands, old fields, or pastures. Individual nests are typically protected by some over-head cover of branches, limbs, or vines. A recent study in Tennessee (Johnson et al. 2022) documented that Nest-site selection was positively associated with the amount of early succession and shrubland available in pre-nesting home ranges and positively associated with visual obstruction (0–50 cm above-ground) and percent vegetation cover above the nest but negatively associated with distance from trails or roads. Johnson and others (2022) found that the single best predictor of daily nest survival was the percent vegetative cover above the nest.

Brood survival depends on habitats that provide cover and insects. Herbaceous vegetation at ground level supports the insect populations necessary for growth and survival of young turkeys while also providing cover from predation. Hens with broods seek openings (e.g., forest clearings, fields, pastures, rights-of-ways, log landings, skid trails, forest savannas) with abundant herbaceous plants and insects often spending the majority of their day foraging (up to 89%, Chamberlain et al. 2020). Forest savannas are areas with sparse tree canopies that provide an herbaceous layer of plants rich in insect production. The overhead cover available in forest savannas provides some added protection for broods from avian predators. Good interspersion of open areas with other habitats enables hens to quickly travel from nest sites to brood habitats; minimizing travel distances among brood habitats helps minimize poult mortality. Chamberlain et al. (2020) found that daily brood survival was negatively associated with the distance traveled from the nesting location to the brood rearing ranges (survival decreased as distance traveled increased), further indicating the need for interspersion of suitable habitats.

Except in areas with very little available water or during unusually dry summers, water does not appear to be an important limiting factor for turkeys. Turkeys usually are able to meet

their need for water from moisture obtained from dew and by eating green leaves, soft mast, and insects.

**Reproduction and Brood Survival**

Wild turkey population levels depend on reproductive success. Total reproduction is influenced by a combination of factors that include nesting and renesting rates, nest and hen success, clutch size, fertility rates, hatching success, and poult or hen survival.

Wild turkeys generally breed from late March through mid-April, with the timing driven primarily driven by photoperiod. Renesting efforts may extend into May. Although juvenile gobblers are sexually mature and capable of breeding, adult males do most of the breeding. Because sperm can remain viable in female reproductive tracts for several weeks, eggs may be fertilized for up to 4 weeks after copulation. During the early stages of egg laying, hens may lay an egg every 2-3 days. As egg laying progresses, hens generally lay an egg per day until a full clutch of 10-12 eggs is reached. Hens cover their nest after laying an egg until they begin incubation. Once a full clutch is completed, incubation begins and normally lasts 28 days until hatching occurs. High fertility rates (90-98%) for eastern wild turkeys result in most eggs hatching after 28 days. Peak hatching date in Virginia is about May 5, but may range from late April until mid-May.

The percentage of birds that nest is a critical factor in reproductive success. Nesting rates in western Virginia have been estimated to be about 80% for adult female and 50% for juvenile females. In other areas, nesting rates may be higher and approach 100%. Hen condition (i.e., body mass and fat stores) in the spring may be affected by inclement weather and food availability during the fall and winter, and in turn may influence nesting rate, clutch size, hatching rate, brood survival, and overall reproductive success.

On average, approximately half of the hens that attempt to nest will successfully hatch a brood. But on an annual basis, hen success may vary widely and range from 33% to 82%. Nest predation is a common reason for failure, with crows and raccoons being common nest predators. Hens disrupted during egg-laying or incubation may abandon the nest. Hens are less likely to abandon the nest if disturbed later in incubation than if they were disturbed early in the nesting period. Hens that abandon their nest may re-nest. However, re-nest rates are low and the number of eggs in second clutches are typically lower (6-8 eggs) than found in first clutches.

Due to inclement weather and predation, poult mortality rate during the first 4-weeks is a critical factor affecting recruitment. Poult mortality rates may average about 50% but annually can range widely from 21% to 88%. Poults less than 1 week of age are usually able to withstand weather extremes because they still have significant yolk sacs available for energy and the entire brood is able to find shelter underneath the brooding hen. Older poults that have exhausted their yolk sacs and are too large (e.g., quail size) to all fit under the brooding hen have higher mortality rates, especially when cold and wet conditions persist for over 12 hours. Normal weather conditions during May and June (i.e., not too dry or too wet) are considered to be best for good brood survival.

Especially during the first 2 weeks when poults are unable to fly, predation is also an important factor affecting poult survival. Although they readily seek cover when threatened by

predators, flightless poults can be easy prey. Females with young broods typically try to distract predators by mimicking a broken wing. Poults are typically able to fly at 8-12 days of age and often start roosting off the ground in shrubs at that point. Typically roosting in trees is possible by 2-3 weeks of age.

Ultimately, production rates represent the outcome of all the aspects of nesting and brood survival. While production rates vary greatly from year to year, an average of about 1.5 poults (that live to 4 weeks of age) are produced by each hen turkey. Production also varies depending on the age of the hen with adult hens being more productive than juveniles. Research in Virginia found juvenile hens produced 0.5 poults/hen, 2-year-old birds produced 1.4 poults/hen, and adults (3+ years old) produced 2.6 poults/hen.

**Mortality**

During a study from 1989-1994, the annual mortality rate of hen turkeys in western Virginia averaged 52% (or a survival rate of 48%) but varied widely among years from a high of 66% mortality to a low of 34%.

Annual mortality of juvenile hens was higher (56%) than adults (48%). Another Virginia study found annual hen mortality rates were 65%. The leading cause of hen mortality in Virginia has been predation (53% of all mortalities) (Fig. 2). Legal hunting harvests only accounted for 12% of all deaths and were exceeded by poaching losses (18%) and other losses (17%) such as accidents, diseases, or crippling injuries (natural and human-caused).

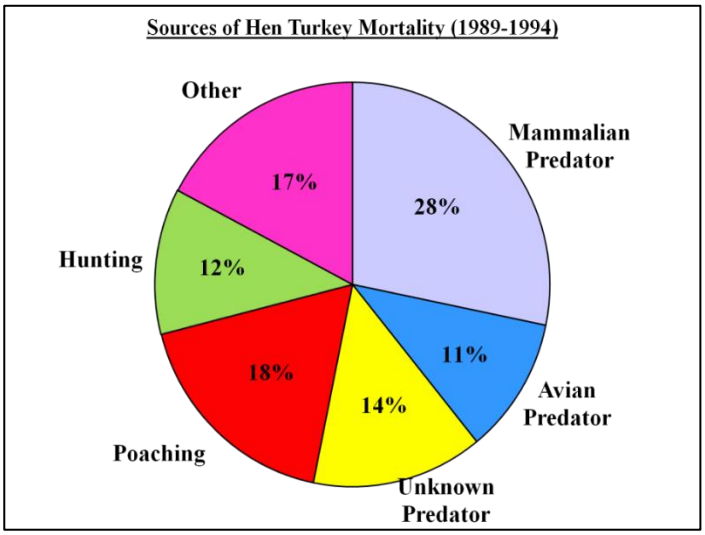


Figure 2. Sources of mortality for hen turkeys in Virginia and West Virginia from 1989-1994 (n=549 deaths).

In western Virginia and West Virginia, mammalian predators (primarily bobcats) generally take more turkeys than avian predators (primarily great-horned owls). Predation also tends to increase during spring dispersal as juveniles move into unfamiliar habitats outside their home range.

Legal harvest rates of female turkeys during the fall seasons in Virginia averaged 12% during the 5- year study but annually ranged from 3% to 20%. Acorn mast production also

affects fall harvest rates. Lean mast years result in increased harvest rates as turkeys spend additional time searching for available foods, making them more vulnerable to hunters. Mortality of hens has been found to be one of the largest factors in population growth (Norman et.al. 2001, Londe et al. 2023).

Illegal harvests (either intentional or accidental) also can be a major mortality factor for hens. The annual rate of illegal hen harvest in the Virginia study averaged at least 5% during the fall hunting seasons and 6% during the spring gobbler season. In fact, illegal harvest levels can exceed legal harvest rates in Virginia and may be an important factor affecting population levels. Similar illegal harvest rates also were found by studies in Florida, Missouri, and Kentucky. In the Virginia study, the majority of the spring illegal hen mortality took place during the first 2 weeks of the spring gobbler season, suggesting that the timing of spring gobbler hunting may contribute to illegal harvest. However, not all Virginia studies have shown such high illegal harvests of hens. Research on large private land holdings in the Tidewater region showed no illegal kills. Because more hens are active during the egg-laying period before the onset of peak incubation, earlier spring hunting seasons may expose more non-incubating hens to potential illegal harvests than occurs later in the nesting season.

Like hens, gobbler annual mortality rates also vary. There have been several research projects in Virginia looking at harvest rates in gobblers in both eastern and western portions of Virginia. These studies have estimated annual mortality of adult gobblers to range from 46% to 69%. The findings of the two study area mortality rates were fairly similar. Most of the annual mortality for adult gobblers was concentrated in the spring gobbler season when the hunting mortality rate was 25%. In contrast, juvenile male (jake) mortality rates were only 5% during the spring hunting season. Mortality of adult and juvenile males was comparable during the other seasons of the year. Known illegal kills accounted for 5% of the fall male mortalities, but the potential illegal fall mortality rate might have approached 9%. Most poaching losses of male birds took place following the fall turkey season.

Mortality of adult birds due to starvation is uncommon in Virginia. However, extended periods of packed snow and ice can affect survival rates by making limited food supplies unavailable.

**Diseases**

Mortality from diseases and parasites can also occur, but typically these effects are localized and pose little large-scale threat to turkey populations or humans. A variety of pathogens have been reported in wild turkeys, including avian pox virus, lymphoproliferative disease virus (LPDV), reticuloedotheliosis virus (REV), avian cholera (*Pasturella multocida*), *Mycoplasma* sp., sarcocystosis (*Sarcocystis* sp.), toxoplasmosis (*Toxoplasma gondii*), blackhead disease (*Histomonas meleagridis*), *Haemoproteus meleagridis*, *Leucocytozoon smithi*, and tracheal worms (*Syngamus trachea*). Fortunately, two of the most commonly diagnosed diseases, avian pox virus and blackhead disease, do not pose a risk to public health. A third disease, LPDV, is a pathogen that was diagnosed for the first time in wild North American turkeys in 2009 and is not believed to pose a threat to humans.

Avian pox is a highly contagious condition that typically affects wild turkeys during warmer months. While many infected turkeys do not show any visible signs of disease, clinically affected birds display lesions consisting of nodules that eventually scab over. The nodules are

usually restricted to the unfeathered portions of the head and legs or in the mouth. Affected turkeys may develop vision impairment and breathing problems due to obstructions from nodules, significant weight loss, and/or weakness. Blood- feeding insects, especially mosquitoes, are the main mode of avian pox virus transmission. Avian pox formerly posed a significant problem when diseased pen-reared turkeys were released for population restoration (see section on "Restocking Efforts"). This disease is generally widespread throughout Virgina but typically results in localized or minor mortality events. Large-scale mortality events are rare.

Blackhead disease, caused by a protozoan parasite *Histomonas meleagridis*, often induces non-descript clinical signs in affected birds, including listlessness, droopy wings, and ruffled feathers. Infected turkeys usually have lesions in the gastrointestinal tract and the liver. Earthworms play a role in parasite transmission by storing eggs from parasites after ingestion of droppings from infected birds. Uninfected birds may be exposed to the parasite after eating earthworms harboring the parasites. Turkeys are particularly susceptible to *H. meleagridis*, and severe disease and high mortality may be observed. Infection rates among wild turkeys are unknown, but mortality rate usually exceeds 75 percent among infected birds. Unfortunately, many of these outbreaks are under reported and may go unnoticed on the landscape. Although the infections can create significant localized effects, it is generally not thought to cause significant population level impacts.

Lymphoproliferative disease virus (LPDV) and reticuloendotheliosis virus (REV) are both forms of viral tumorigenic viral diseases. LPDV had previously only been known to occur in domestic turkeys in the United Kingdom and Middle East, but the first North American case was diagnosed in 2009. Harvested wild turkeys have been recently diagnosed from Virginia and many other states (i.e., Arkansas, Georgia, Maine, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia). Recent surveys indicate that LPDV is geographically widespread, but likely accounts for a small percentage of disease-related mortality in wild turkeys. Similarly, REV has been detected in the blood of healthy appearing wild turkeys across a wide geographic area. There remains a great deal of uncertainty with these diseases in wild populations. Although clinical impacts seem to be minor, there remains a potential for subclinical effects of the disease affecting survival, reproduction, recruitment or other population vital rates. Additional research is ongoing in neighboring states that should close some knowledge gaps on the disease impacts of wild populations.

Research shows that the majority of domestic poultry diseases are spread from farm to farm via contaminated humans, poultry equipment, and farm vehicles. Humans, equipment, or vehicles that come into direct contact with diseased wild turkeys do have the potential to transmit infectious agents to domestic poultry. With opportunities for direct contact with wild turkeys, operations with compromised biosecurity practices (i.e., poor traffic control, isolation, or sanitation) or free-ranging domestic poultry (including both backyard flocks and large commercial flocks) have the potential to be exposed to diseases carried by wild birds. While direct contact with contaminated feces, uric acid droppings, nasal discharge, or saliva from sick wild birds may result in disease transmission to domestic poultry, airborne transmission of infectious agents over large distances is not considered to be a significant mode of disease transmission.

Supplemental feeding of turkeys and other wildlife may lead to aflatoxin exposure. Aflatoxins are poisons produced by fungi in spoiled grains and have been linked to wild turkey mortality. Aflatoxins may be found in contaminated corn and other small grains that are often

used to feed wildlife. Aflatoxin levels are closely monitored in grains intended for livestock, but when levels are too high for safe use by domestic animals, these grains are often sold as "wildlife corn". One study showed that over 50% of corn samples from North Carolina and South Carolina contained aflatoxins. Turkeys that feed on grains with toxic amounts of aflatoxin may exhibit weight loss, reduced liver function, decreased reproduction, and suppression of the immune system. A recent study in Mississippi found that aflatoxins were present at lethal levels in sampled corn piles during the spring and summer months starting 3 days after placement and by 8 days after placement, 100% of sampled piles contained lethal levels of aflatoxins (Huang et al. 2022).

In addition to potential aflatoxin exposure, supplemental feeding of turkeys also congregates birds and may increase the transmission of other diseases among birds. Debilitated birds are more likely to feed from a convenient source, such as a feed pile, rather than find food on their own. Consequently, artificial feeding sites may expose healthy turkeys to infectious agents either through direct contact with other birds or indirectly via contamination of the feed from infected feces, saliva, nasal discharge, or urates. In addition to the disease concerns, feeding-related concentration of turkeys may also increase predation and poaching losses.

**Population Dynamics**

The combined effects of reproduction and mortality on population size and growth determine the dynamics of a wild turkey population. With the wide variation that sometimes occurs in reproduction (e.g., nesting success, poult mortality) and survival (e.g., predation rates, hunting harvests), wild turkey populations may also experience large year-to-year changes (± 50%).

When turkey population densities are low, weather is favorable, and resources are abundant, un-hunted wild turkey populations can maximize population growth because reproduction and survival are both optimal. Under such favorable circumstances, turkey population size could double every 1-2 years. The maximum population growth for turkeys has been observed to be about 68% per year (after reintroductions in Iowa). Actual growth rates are highly variable and are usually much less than the maximum because population growth is influenced by a variety of factors such as available food, weather conditions, habitat quality, number of females, population size, predation, and hunting harvests.

Turkey populations cannot grow indefinitely. Similar to deer population dynamics, increasing turkey densities also inhibit recruitment and slow population growth rates. Turkey population growth and density will become limited as habitat resources (e.g., food supplies, brood habitat, nesting sites) become limiting. Eventually the biological carrying capacity (BCC), which is the maximum number of turkeys an area can support over an extended period, will be reached. The BCC for wild turkeys is unknown for Virginia and other areas in North America, but turkey populations have been documented to reach densities as high as 32 turkeys/mi$^2$ in Alabama, 25 (or more) birds/mi$^2$ in New York, and 20 turkeys/mi$^2$ in Iowa.

Population modeling for Virginia wild turkeys has found that population growth rates were most strongly influenced by the fall hunting mortality of hens (at the level occurring in the 1989-1994 study in western Virginia) than by reproductive factors. Research in Virginia has

shown that fall hunting mortality on hens during long hunting seasons, that also overlapped deer season, can be an additive loss to the population (that is, hunting losses add to the existing natural mortality). Because this additive mortality results in reduced survival and population growth, regulating the fall harvest of hens has been the primary option for managing turkey population levels. However, at current harvest levels, the fall harvest is not believed to be having as significant of an impact on population trajectories.

While managing the harvest of hens is the most effective population management tool to influence turkey population levels (like regulating the harvest of does to manage deer populations), harvest losses (both legal and illegal) are still only a relatively small component of the overall turkey mortality (Fig. 2). Unlike other big game species, where legal hunting is the primary form of mortality (e.g., bear, deer), the combined influence of many other sources of mortality (e.g., predation, weather, poaching) and reproduction may overwhelm the anticipated impact that changes in hunting seasons might have on turkey population levels. Additionally, hunting mortality can vary from year to year due to weather factors, mast abundance, and influence of other hunting seasons. With all the background variation that occurs in both reproduction and mortality, yearly changes in turkey populations can be very unpredictable. As a result, the annual impact of population management strategies cannot be precisely predicted. Population modeling suggests fall harvest hen mortality rates of 10% or less still permit long-term population growth, while populations would generally stabilize at a maximum fall hunting mortality rate of 15%. Gobbler hunting mortality in both the spring and fall is generally considered to have minimal population impact.

## PROGRAM HISTORY OF WILD TURKEYS

The history of the wild turkey in Virginia and across the United States is a story of abuse to the brink of extinction, followed by restoration, and management. By the end of the 19th century, turkey populations had been extirpated (i.e., eliminated) throughout most of Virginia and only survived in the most inaccessible areas. As one of the landmark wildlife management success stories, wild turkey populations have been reestablished in record numbers across the continent, even beyond their historic range.

### Pre-colonial / Colonial Period

As an abundant and easy prey, Native Americans commonly used wild turkeys for food, clothing, blankets, tools, weapons, and ceremonies. The Spanish Conquistador, Cortés, may have been the first European to give accounts of the wild turkey in 1519, in Mexico. Probably originally domesticated by the Aztecs, Cortés sent Mexican turkeys back to Spain, where they quickly spread across Europe and to the British Isles. Various strains of these domesticated Mexican birds were shipped to Jamestown, Virginia for the early colonists around 1607; additional turkeys were delivered to Boston in 1629. These early birds from Mexico (via England) became the original source of today's commercial turkey industry.

The first description of wild turkeys in the mid-Atlantic region came from the Roanoke Island Colony of North Carolina about 1585. There were no credible estimates of wild turkey populations in Virginia when Jamestown was settled in 1607, but many journals noted that wild

turkeys were very abundant. Many reports and landmark names reflect the abundance of turkeys in Virginia into the 1700s. Despite being hunted and trapped year-round in the early 1700s, wild turkeys continued to survive the early pressures of habitat changes and market hunting. There is no doubt that the wild turkey played an important role for early settlers as a source of food and income from game markets.

**Population Declines**

As human populations expanded and cities grew throughout the country and in Virginia, habitat destruction, combined with increasing demand for wild turkeys and other wild game, began to take a toll on turkey and other wildlife populations. Much of the demand for popular foods like wild turkey was met by professional market hunters. These commercial hunters were very effective with stories of hundreds of wild turkey carcasses being shipped on trains destined for large cities. In 1872, wild turkeys sold for $1 each.

Agricultural practices during the late 1800s and early 1900s further reduced habitat for turkeys. These practices involved extensive deforestation, burning, grazing, and cultivation. The lowest point for turkey populations likely occurred during the period 1890-1920. By 1916, turkey populations in Virginia had been extirpated from 2/3 of the state. By 1941, there was serious doubt that the wild turkey would remain a game species in Virginia and throughout the United States.

**Population Recovery**

The agricultural practices of the late 1800s and early 1900s reduced soil fertility and limited productivity. Once productivity declined, many farmlands were abandoned, and farmers migrated to cities for industrial jobs. These reverting farmlands enabled all wildlife, including wild turkeys, to reoccupy newly forested habitats.

Congressional approval of the Weeks Act in 1911 made it possible to purchase and protect deforested land in Virginia and begin forest restoration on what later became national forest lands. The first land purchase in Virginia occurred during 1911 and contained 13,450 acres in the Mt. Rogers area. Established in 1916, the Natural Bridge National Forest became Virginia's first national forest. Subsequent purchases and name changes have resulted in the current 1.7 million acres of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in Virginia, assuring large, forested areas for turkey habitat. In 1938, the Virginia Game Commission and the U.S. Forest Service executed a formal agreement (the oldest of its kind in the United States) to fund additional wildlife habitat and management work on national forests within the state. The creation of the 200,000-acre Shenandoah National Park in 1936 also provided additional protection for wild turkeys and their habitat. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) provided funds and manpower to create and manage brood range on these public lands.

Concurrent with improving habitats, early efforts to reverse the population decline of wild turkeys included the creation of laws to protect turkeys. In order to limit market hunting, hunting methods and sales restrictions were established in 1912. The growing conservation ethic and awareness for the welfare of wild turkeys and other wildlife also led the General Assembly to pass the "Robin Bill" in 1912, which prohibited the sale of wild turkeys and other

wildlife.

Even though there were laws in place to limit the methods and numbers of turkeys that could be taken, enforcement was ineffective. The lack of enforcement to halt market hunting spurred the creation of the Department of Game in 1916. The Department of Game hired game wardens to protect the wildlife species of Virginia. From 1916 to 1929, the Department of Game added regulations and enforcement for game protection. The Pittman-Robertson Act in 1938 provided significant additional financial support for wildlife management and research programs in Virginia and throughout the country. With the added funding for the Department of Game, came renewed efforts for game management activities. Not only was considerable attention given to the wild turkey, elk were reintroduced, deer populations were restored, and predators were controlled.

**Restocking Efforts**

To speed the recovery of wild turkeys, the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries began an exhaustive program to restock turkeys across Virginia in 1929. The restocking effort was started by purchasing 150 birds at a cost of $5.00 each. Initially, the practice of releasing game-farm birds was considered a success and birds continued to be purchased at market prices.

An intensive program to raise and release pen-reared wild turkeys was initiated with the hopes of reestablishing new populations. After disappointments with the progress of releasing game-farm birds, a graduate student, Wayne Bailey, was charged in 1933 to investigate different release methods for successfully establishing birds. In 1935, the Virginia Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at Virginia Tech was created with a principal charge to support this artificial propagation program and Henry Mosby was chosen to lead the restoration program. Both Wayne Bailey and Dr. Mosby went on to become early pioneers and renowned biologists for wild turkey management in North America.

Despite diligent efforts to produce “genuine” wild turkeys at 7 different game farms around the state, the release of 21,865 pen-reared birds between 1929 and 1960 (Fig. 3) had virtually no success at reestablishing populations. These pen-raised birds failed to reproduce and survive because they never learned survival skills as young turkeys raised by a wild hen, they were impacted by diseases common to confined conditions and lacked the genetic quality of wild turkeys. Most of the game-farm releases occurred between 1948 and 1960, with the most birds (2,809) being released in 1952.

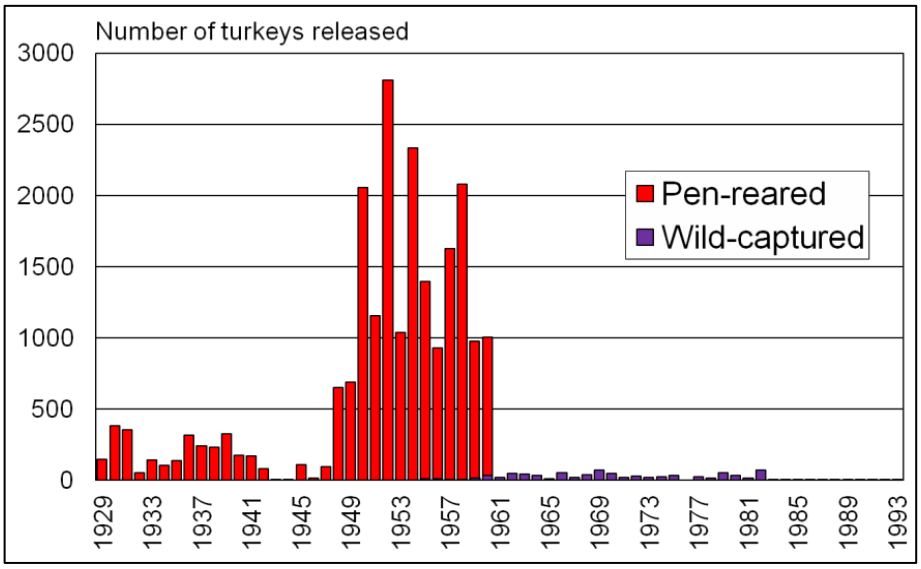


Figure 3. Turkeys released in Virginia for population restoration (1929-1993).

Although game farm operations could produce thousands of birds with the hope of accelerating the pace of restoration, biologists began to suspect that trapping and releasing free ranging wild turkeys would be a more effective approach for successfully establishing new populations. The problem of capturing large numbers of wild turkeys was solved in 1951 in South Carolina when turkeys were first trapped by using a cannon net technique that was originally developed for capturing waterfowl.

In 1955, the Virginia Game Commission began its own trap-and-transfer release program. In the coming years, the trap-and-release program was so successful that the Commission's pen-rearing operations were closed after 1960. During the period 1955-1993, and primarily from the Gathright WMA, the Game Department trapped and released 917 wild turkeys. These wild-trapped birds were released in 22 different counties, primarily in southwest Virginia, the Northern Neck, and the Eastern Shore. The restoration of the wild turkey in Virginia was completed in 1993 with the release of two Gathright WMA birds in Accomack County on the Eastern Shore (Fig. 4). Although overshadowed by the great volume of pen-reared turkeys that were released prior to 1960 (Fig. 3), the trap and transfer program represented a significant effort that produced one of the Commission's greatest conservation achievements. Through the combined benefits of hunting regulation controls, reforestation, public land purchases, effective law enforcement, restocking, and management-based research, turkey populations grew and expanded their range in Virginia (Fig. 5 - 6). Today, turkeys are distributed across every county in the state.

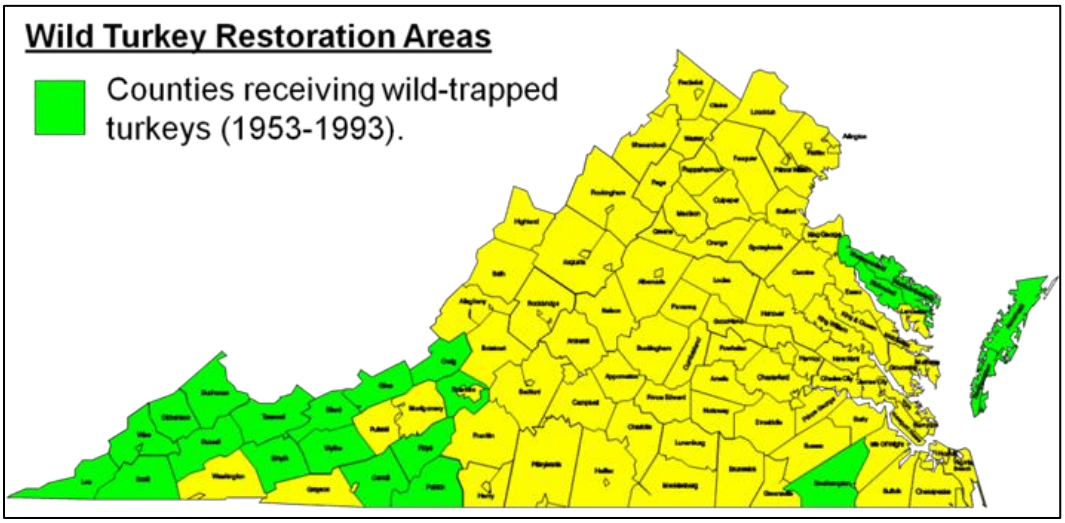


Figure 4. Virginia counties receiving 917 wild-trapped turkeys for population restoration (1955-1993).

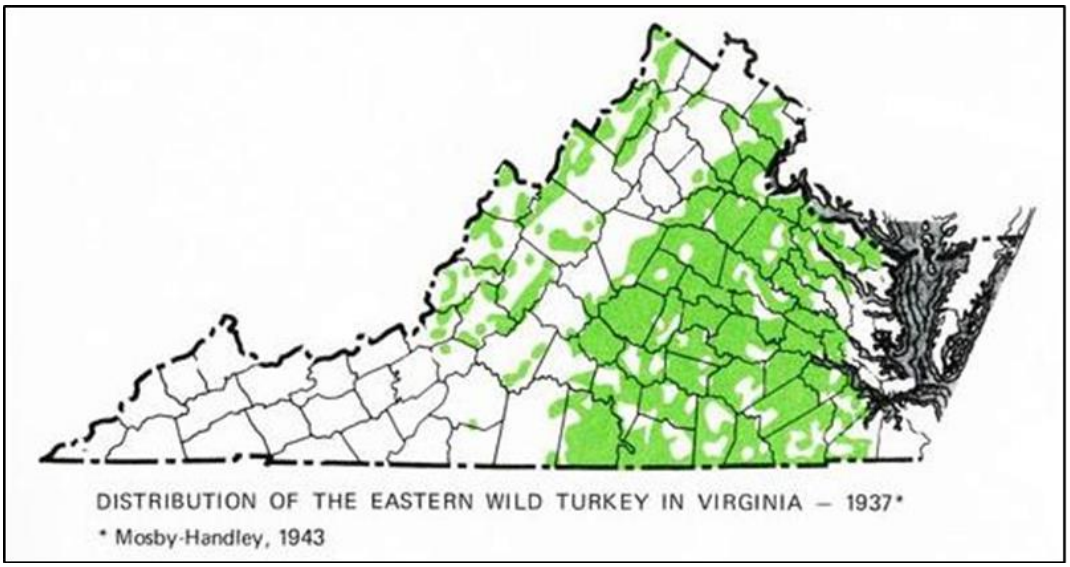


Figure 5. Distribution of wild turkeys in Virginia in 1937.

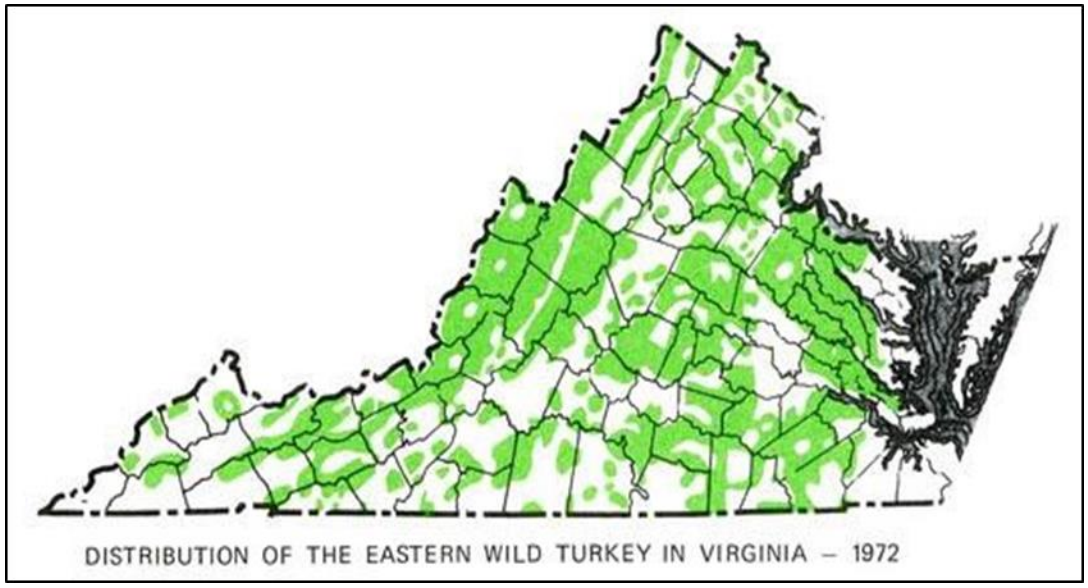


Figure 6. Distribution of wild turkeys in Virginia in 1972.

**Hunting Regulation Changes**

The first regulation restricting wild turkey hunting came in 1885, when the General Assembly set seasons for areas east and west of the Blue Ridge Mountains (EBR, WBR respectively). The season east of the Blue Ridge Mountains was from October 1 through January 15. In counties west of the Blue Ridge the fall turkey season was longer, from September 15 through mid-February. These earlier fall/winter seasons likely helped to establish fall hunting as the traditional time of year to hunt wild turkeys in Virginia. This law also prohibited the buying and selling of wild turkeys. In 1904, the General Assembly further restricted the shooting of wild turkeys at night and the capture of wild turkeys with traps or nets. The legislature made it illegal to bait wild turkeys in 1922.

Fall Hunting Seasons

***1940s -1971***.

Between the 1940s and 1971, fall hunting season dates in Virginia were highly variable, with counties sometimes exhibiting large annual changes in turkey season structure (liberal, conservative, closed). As one of the more extreme examples of county variations, Hanover County had fall turkey seasons that changed from November 19 – January 15, to closed, to December 15 – January 15, and back to closed during the 4-year period of 1962 through 1965. In general, season closures were most prevalent in southwestern Virginia with the longer seasons (up to almost 9 weeks long) in the southern Piedmont and northern mountain counties. Unless otherwise closed, seasons prior to 1958 tended to be longer in counties EBR, than in counties WBR. After 1962 the opposite was more normal, with a tendency for longer seasons WBR than EBR. Prior to 1972, the earliest opening date was November 1 and the latest closing date was January 20.

***1972-1988***.

*1972*: The regular long hunting season dates were standardized to a 7-week season (approximately) in all counties EBR and WBR. The standard fall turkey season ran from the

second Monday in November through December 31. As necessary, some counties remained closed or only had 2-week seasons during this period.
*1981*: The fall hunting season was extended to an 8-week season by opening one week earlier; the new standard season dates became the first Monday in November through December 31.
*1987*: The fall hunting season was extended to nearly a 9-week season by closing about one week later. The new standard season dates became the first Monday in November through the first Saturday in January.

***1989-2010***.

This period is characterized by many changes to create more fall turkey hunting opportunity in previously closed counties or counties with conservative seasons (primarily in eastern Virginia). Due to the increase in deer hunting opportunities (e.g., longer seasons, muzzleloader seasons) and associated impacts on turkey mortality, many changes were also made in the most liberal areas to shorten fall turkey seasons and minimize overlap with deer hunting. The net result was a reduction in fall turkey season length from about 9 weeks to 6 weeks in many counties. Some key changes included:

*1989*: In 11 Shenandoah Valley counties, the 9-week season was shortened by one week when turkey season was closed during the opening week of the firearms deer season. This resulted in a split turkey season: two weeks before the opening of firearms deer season, closed for the opening week of firearms deer hunting, and then resuming in the second week of the firearms deer season.
*1991*: The shortened split turkey season was expanded to 45 counties.
*1995*: Multiple changes included:

- The shortened split turkey season was expanded to 71 counties, all the remaining counties with a long season.
- The early 2-week split in the season was moved to start one week earlier.
- The second season also started later during the first or second week of December.

*1999*: Turkey hunting was permitted on Thanksgiving Day in counties with a fall season.
*2003*: The 3-week fall seasons structure were replaced by 4-week seasons.
*2006*: Opening day for turkey hunting was changed from Mondays to Saturdays. Season lengths were unchanged.
*2008*: The season was split between EBR and WBR. The starting and ending dates of the second segment of the EBR season were shifted 1 week earlier. There was no net change in season length.
*2008*: Accomack County, Northampton County, and the City of Suffolk were opened to fall hunting. With the exception of the heavily populated cities around Norfolk and Virginia Beach, all of Virginia had fall turkey hunting for the first time since the early part of the 1900s.

***2011-2023***.

Hunting season changes were made to help stimulate population growth and provide additional fall turkey hunting opportunities:
*2011*: Reducing the open fall season to two weeks, the December portion of the fall turkey was eliminated in 11 northern mountain counties WBR.
*2011*: Two additional weeks of late January turkey hunting (after the deer seasons) were added in counties with a standard 6-week fall season, creating an 8-week season.

*2019*: The first segment of fall turkey season was moved 2 weeks earlier to reduce the overlap with muzzleloader season. The day before Thanksgiving was added to accommodate hunter desires. A new 6-week season structure was added in 25 counties to assist in meeting population objectives.
*2021*: Fall archery season was extended to occur concurrent with deer and bear archery season.

*Legal turkeys*. In general, since 1951, it has been legal to harvest turkeys of either sex during fall hunting seasons, but with the following exceptions:
East of the Blue Ridge
*1968-78*: Bearded birds / Gobblers only
*1979-82*: Only one hen was permitted
West of the Blue Ridge
*1971, 1976-82*: Only one hen was permitted
*1971-74*: Bearded birds / Gobblers only in southwestern counties

Spring Hunting Seasons

Spring hunting for bearded turkeys started in Virginia during 1961 as an experimental 6-day season (April 24-29) on three public hunting areas (Gathright WMA, Fort A.P. Hill, and Camp Pickett) and resulted in the harvest of 34 gobblers (24 at Camp Pickett, 5 at Fort A.P. Hill, and 5 at Gathright WMA). During 1962, the experimental 6-day season (April 23-28) was expanded to include four entire counties with predominately private ownerships (Amelia, Chesterfield, Nottoway, and Powhatan) and additional public areas (Gathright WMA, Goshen WMA, Little North Mountain WMA, Fort A.P. Hill, Camp Pickett, Camp Peary, Ft. Eustis, Naval Weapons Station, and Cheatham Annex); 129 birds were killed, including one bearded hen. The 6-day spring season was again expanded in 1963 to include 43 counties. Through the 1960s and 1970s, spring hunting continued to be opened in a growing number of counties. The first statewide spring turkey season occurred in 1977, with Lee County included as the last county to be opened for spring gobbler hunting.

*Spring season length*.
Season lengths gradually increased through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Season length changes for spring gobbler hunting in Virginia include:
*1961*: First 6-day spring season.
*1965*: Season length extended to 7 hunting days, including 2 Saturdays.
*1966*: Season length extended to 12 hunting days, still including 2 Saturdays.
*1967*: Season length extended to 13 hunting days, including 3 Saturdays.
*1968*: Season length extended to 18 hunting days, still including 3 Saturdays.
*1969*: Season length extended to 19 hunting days, including 4 Saturdays.
*1973*: Season length extended to 25 hunting days, including 5 Saturdays.
*1988*: Season length extended to 31 hunting days, including 6 Saturdays.
*2004*: Season length extended to 32 hunting days, including 7 Saturdays with youth season inclusion.
*2014*: Season length extended to 38 hunting days including 7 Saturdays with Sunday hunting expansion.

*Spring season timing*.

Spring gobbler seasons in Virginia have traditionally been set to open around the time of peak incubation because nesting hens may be less vulnerable to illegal kills as they spend more time on the nest. Some milestones for spring gobbler season opening dates in Virginia include:

*1961-1972*: Opening dates varied between April 17 and April 29.

*1973-1989*: Opening dates were either the second Saturday in April (12 years) or the third Saturday in April (5 years) and varied between April 8 and April 17.

*1990-1999*: Opening dates occurred on the Saturday closest to April 15 and varied between April 12 and April 18.

*2000-Present*: Opening dates occurred on the second Saturday in April and varied between April 8 and April 14.

*Spring hunting hours*.

Beginning at one-half hour before sunrise, morning-only hunting has been designed to help minimize nest disturbance and potential poaching of hens. Changing closing times for spring gobbler hunting hours in Virginia include:

*1961*: Hunting hours for the first experimental season ended at 12:00 noon.

*1962*: Hunting hours were shortened to end at 10:00 a.m.

*1970*: Hunting hours were extended until 11:00 a.m.

*1990*: Hunting hours for spring gobbler hunting were extended until 12:00 noon.

*2003*: Hunting hours during the last 12 days of the season were extended from 12:00 noon until sunset.

*2021*: Hunting hours during the last 20 days of the season were extended from 12:00 noon until sunset.

<u>Bag Limits</u>

*1940s*: The general state law in 1940 was 2 birds per day and 4 per season, with the exception of 2 birds per day and 2 birds per season in most northern counties WBR.

*1951-1987*: The bag limit was generally 1 per day, 2 per year with the following exceptions:

- 1971-74: 3 birds per year statewide, all of which may be taken in the spring gobbler season
- 1975: 3 birds per year EBR, all of which may be taken in the spring gobbler season

*1987-1999*: Beginning with the 1987-88 hunting seasons, the statewide bag limit was 1 per day, 3 per year, no more than 2 of which could be taken in the fall or spring.

*1999-Present*: Beginning with the 1999-2000 hunting seasons, the statewide bag limit remained 1 per day, 3 per year, but no more than 2 of which may be taken in the fall which means all 3 could be taken in the spring.

<u>Youth Hunting Days</u>

*2004*: Youth spring gobbler day established on the first Saturday in April for hunters 15 years old and younger.

*2008*: Youth fall turkey hunting day established on the third Saturday in October for hunters 15 years old and younger.

*2009*: Hunting hours for the youth spring gobbler day were extended from 12:00 to sunset.

*2014*: Apprentice license hunters were added to create a Youth and Apprentice Hunting Season.

*2019*: Youth and Apprentice fall hunting weekend was moved to the second Saturday in October.

**Population Monitoring Programs**

No simple methods exist for estimating key wild turkey population characteristics (e.g., recruitment rates, mortality rates, population growth rates, density) at a scale useful for management. The best estimates of these parameters can only be obtained through expensive and site-specific research. To assess wild turkey population status over large areas, Virginia has used a combination of indices derived from harvest, observations of age and sex structure, and hunter surveys.

Hunting harvest data are a principal source of information for monitoring turkey population status in Virginia. Turkey harvest information has been collected since 1927. From 1927-1950, turkey harvest numbers were estimated by county game wardens. Beginning in 1951, mandatory checking of turkeys was required at official big game check stations. Through the years, as many as 1,500 check stations across the state have provided annual harvest information on black bears, white-tailed deer, and wild turkey. In contrast to many states that estimate their annual turkey harvest, Virginia turkey harvest figures represent an actual known minimum count.

Beginning in 2005, successful spring gobbler hunters had the option to check turkeys through a new telephone checking system (1-866-GOT-GAME) or at a traditional check station. In 2010, spring-harvested turkeys could not be checked at check stations; instead, they were required to be checked electronically (via telephone or internet). For the 2011-12 hunting season, fall turkey hunters were provided the option to also use the electronic checking system. Beginning in 2021 all turkey harvests were moved to the electronic reporting system with the closure of all physical check stations for all big game species in Virginia.

While harvest data from the big game checking system are a major source of population-related information, other programs provide important supplementary data:

*Fall-feather collections*.

Between 1958 and 2010, 53 years of turkey productivity information had been collected at big game check stations from fall-harvested birds. Feather samples from birds provided valuable recruitment information from the sex and age composition of the fall harvest. These collections were discontinued in 2011 due to hunter use of electronic checking and declining fall harvests (with associated feather samples).

*Brood surveys*.

With the decrease of the fall-feather collections to monitor productivity, a new system for reporting turkey broods was implemented in 2007. VDWR staff provides observations of turkey broods, hens, and gobblers they see while driving their normal day to day duties in July and August. Additional surveys are completed by volunteers associated with the Master Naturalist Chapters as well as members of the NWTF chapters.

*Spring gobbler hunter survey*.

The VDWR conducts an annual survey of spring gobbler hunters to monitor harvest age ratios, gobbling chronology, hen observations, and spring hunter satisfactions. Hunters in across the state annually provide information on some 3,500 hunts and 12,000 hours of hunting.

*Bowhunter survey*.

Archery hunters (primarily deer hunters) provide observations on many wildlife species during their fall hunting trips. Among many questions about the wildlife they see, hunters are asked to provide observations of wild turkeys. Thousands of hours of observations are collected annually that provide population indices on turkeys and many other wildlife species.

*Hunter surveys*.

A periodic mail survey of a sample of hunters provides information on effort, harvest, and opinions related to all game species. Fall and spring turkey hunters are well represented in the 2% sample of residence license holders.

*Turkey gobbling surveys*.

Each spring VDWR and US Forest Service staff conduct approximately 50 surveys (10-mile route) and count the number of turkeys gobbling (and grouse drumming). The survey routes are run twice each year, once during the week before the spring gobbler season and once during the first week of the spring gobbler season.

**Important Wild Turkey Research in Virginia**

Contributing to the wealth of knowledge about wild turkeys in the Commonwealth, Virginia has been fortunate to have many important research studies conducted on wild turkeys within the state. Results of these studies have been published in the scientific literature and have made significant contributions to the knowledge of wild turkey management throughout the United States. These studies have resulted from collaborative efforts among the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, the Virginia Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, U.S. Forest Service, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, National Wild Turkey Federation, Department of Statistics at North Carolina State University, and Department of Fishery and Wildlife Biology at Colorado State University. Some of the key Virginia studies have been:

1935-41: As one of the seminal early studies ever conducted on wild turkeys, this study investigated almost every aspect of turkey biology, management, and restoration. Results are summarized in a landmark book, The Wild Turkey in Virginia: Its Status, Life History, and Management, by Mosby and Handley (1943).

1983-1985: A study was conducted to evaluate wild turkey responses to the conversion of mature forests to short rotation, even-aged pine stands in the Piedmont Region of Virginia.

1985-1987: A study of road impacts on turkey survival and habitat use was conducted on George Washington National Forest.

1989-1991: A study was conducted on the economics of spring turkey hunting in Virginia.

1989-1994: This was a 5-year study of the survival and reproductive ecology of wild turkey hens in western Virginia and West Virginia. The primary goals were to determine the impact of fall hunting on turkey populations, understand reproductive ecology, and model population dynamics. With 1,032 radio-tagged females over the 5-year study, this research

was the largest study of wild turkeys ever conducted.

1989-1996: A banding study of 473 gobblers was cooperatively conducted in Virginia and West Virginia to determine gobbler survival rates.

1995: A study of 92 radioed hens explored age-related nesting success and habitat use.

2000: A study of the reproductive ecology of wild turkeys in the Tidewater region was conducted to determine the timing of incubation, predation, and illegal kill of 31 radio-marked hens.

2000-2002: New insights about acorn use by wild turkeys resulted in a chapter called "Turkeys, Acorns, and Oaks" in the book, Oak Forest Ecosystems: Ecology and Management for Wildlife.

2003: Evaluated the relationship between long-term (1973-2002) recruitment, turkey harvest, and acorn production.

2004: Effects of environmental parameters on turkey recruitment were studied.

2003- 2006: Combining results of past research and other studies, wild turkey population models were developed to evaluate density-dependent population growth and the associated harvest yields for management (both spring and fall).

2004- 2006: A cooperative study with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources was conducted to investigate differences in gobbler survival by age, year, location, and hunting season structure.

**Other Management Programs**

National Wild Turkey Federation Super Fund programs. The Virginia State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) has over 7,500 members in about 46 local chapters throughout Virginia. In partnership with the VDWR, the State NWTF Hunting Heritage Super Fund is used for wild turkey projects that support habitat management, education, research, and other conservation projects within Virginia. Since 1985, over $5.6 million has been raised and spent by Virginia chapters on wild turkey conservation projects within Virginia.

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## WILD TURKEY PROGRAM SUPPLY AND DEMAND

### SUPPLY

### Wild Turkey Habitat Supply

Habitat Components

There are six ecoregions (Middle Atlantic Coastal Plain, Southern Appalachian Piedmont, Blue Ridge Mountains, Northern Ridge and Valley, and Northern Cumberland Mountains, and Southern Cumberland Mountains) representing 2 major landscape units (Atlantic Coastal Plain and Appalachian Highlands) in Virginia (Fig. 7). These different landscapes create a diversity of habitat types and forest communities. Northern hardwoods or oak/hickory/pine forest types characterize mountainous areas. Oak/hickory forests are the typical climax forests in the Piedmont. Coastal Plain habitats include coastal marshes along with pine, pine/oak, and bottomland/hardwood forests.

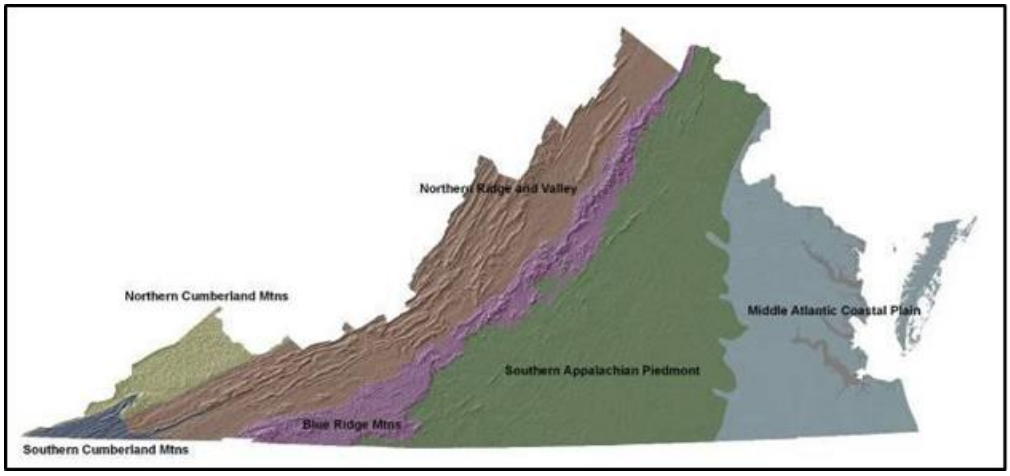


Figure 7. Virginia's ecoregions.

Turkey habitat quality depends on the fertility of the underlying soils. Soils along narrow ridges and steep slopes in the Cumberland Mountains and Ridge and Valley provinces are usually shallow and low in fertility. Valley soils, derived from shale and limestone, are relatively fertile. Blue Ridge soils tend to be deeper and more fertile than Ridge and Valley and Cumberland Mountain soils. Piedmont soils are characterized by sandy loam soils with red clay subsoil. They are generally acidic and low in organic material, phosphorus, and nitrogen. Coastal Plain soils are typically sandy and low in fertility.

Forests (16.1 million acres) represent 62% of Virginia’s land area (Fig. 8). Agricultural lands constitute 32% (8.2 million acres) of the Commonwealth (Fig. 9). Wetlands (Fig. 9) and urban areas primarily represent the balance of land covers in Virginia.

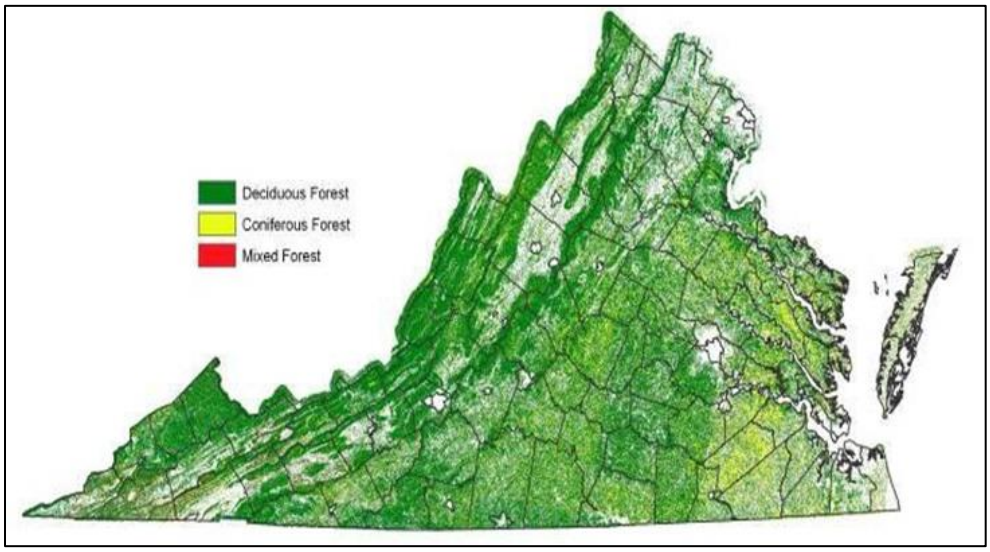

Figure 8. Land cover of Virginia: Forested areas by type.

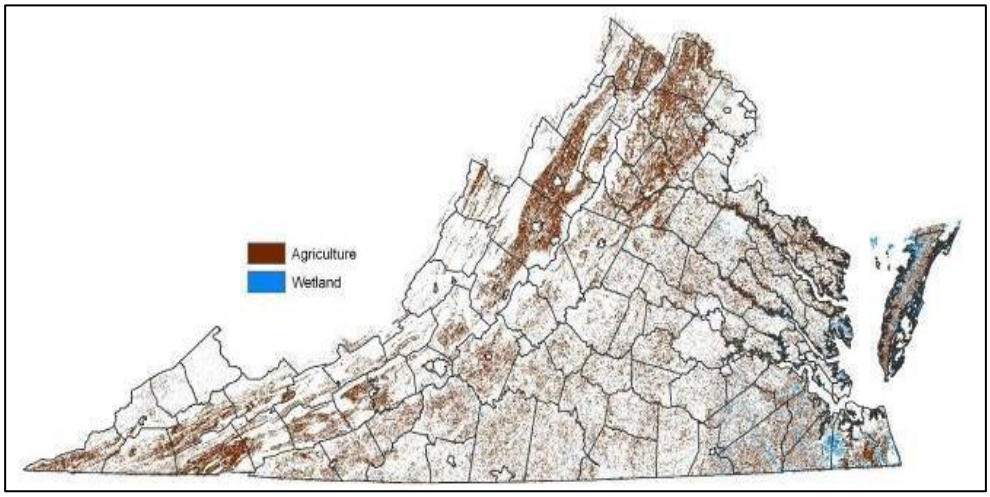

Figure 9. Land cover of Virginia: Agriculture and wetlands.

Changes in diversity of dominant tree species within a stand and interspersion of different stands may also have positive or negative impacts on future turkey populations in some areas. In 1940, hardwood forests made up only 57% of forestland across the state compared to 80% in 2023; softwoods (e.g., pines, cedars) made up 43% and 20% of forested lands in 1940 and 2023, respectively. Decreased timber harvesting during the last 20 years on national forest lands and other public lands west of the Blue Ridge has reduced forest habitat diversity on public lands in western Virginia. In eastern Virginia, habitat quality for turkeys is generally high as active forest management through timber harvesting and prescribed burning are more common. Conversions of eastern Virginia forests from hardwood to pine monocultures (predominantly loblolly) and the potential impacts on turkey habitat quality should be monitored, although currently the improved early successional habitats may offset the loss of hard mast producing species in this area. Continued declines in hard mast

production (primarily white and red oak acorns) and lack of sufficient oak regeneration in climax forests will likely negatively affect wild turkeys into the future.

Despite reversions from other land uses to forestlands through the 20th century, there have been more recent net losses of forested acres statewide. Between 2011 and 2021, over 193 $mi^2$ of forested land have been lost to land-use changes; the majority (55%) for urban development. This equates to over 1,153 $mi^2$ of forest land lost over the past 25 years (National Land Cover Database 2021).

The distribution (Fig. 10) and growth (Fig. 11) of human populations in Virginia plays a major role influencing habitat and land use changes. Primary population centers include areas around Richmond, Norfolk, and northern Virginia (Fig. 10). Growing at a rate of 1.4% each year since 1960, the estimated population in Virginia now exceeds 8 million people. However, the rapidly growing human population is not uniform across the state (Fig. 11). While tremendous growth has been concentrated in urban and suburban areas, some rural areas in the southern Piedmont and in the western mountains have experienced population decline. Development and population expansion of suburban areas typically results in fragmentation of farms and large parcels of land, which generally translates to losses in turkey habitat.

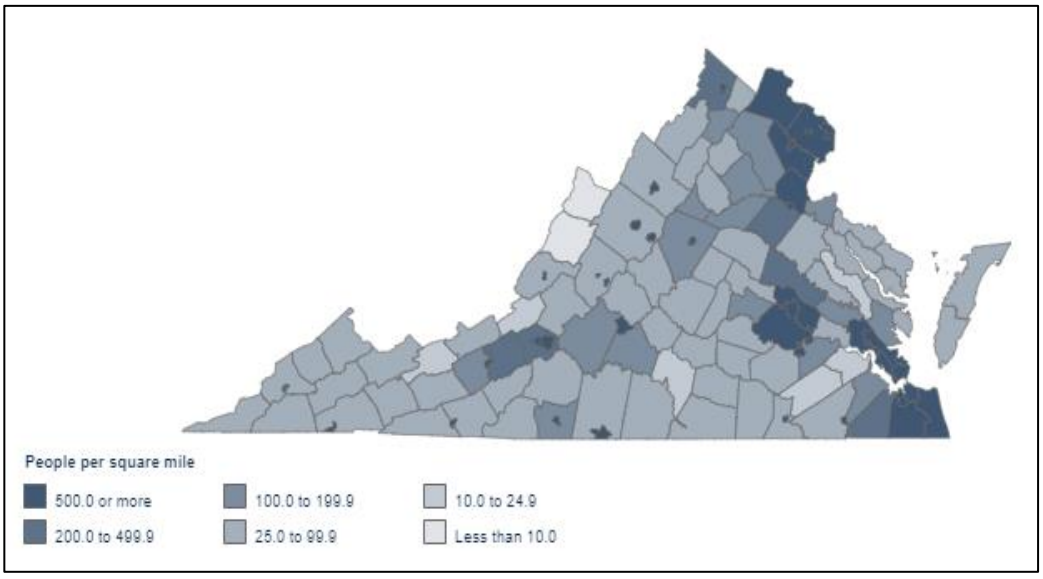


Figure 10: Human population density of Virginia by people per square mile (2020 Census Data).

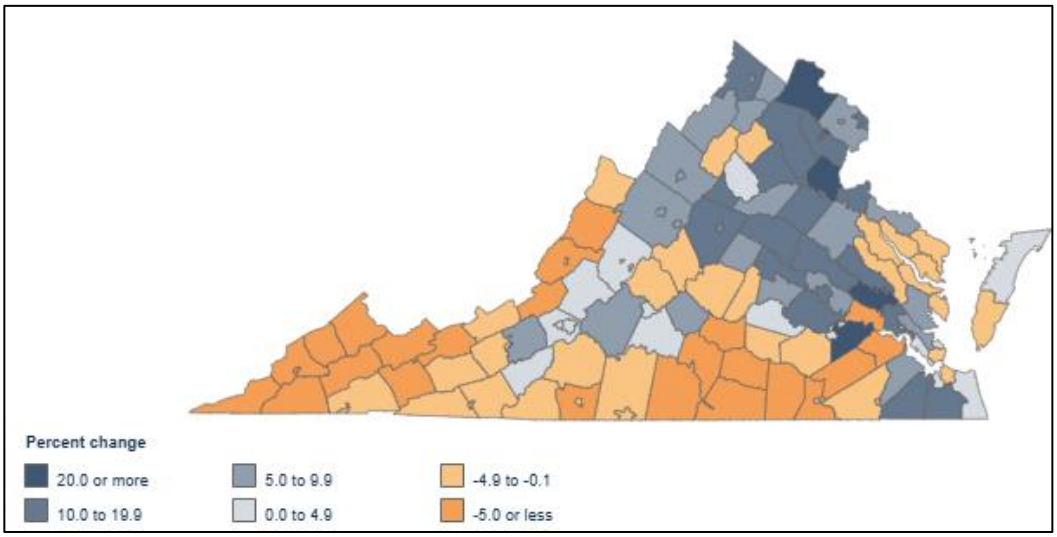


Figure 11: Percent of human population change, from 2010 to 2020 (2020 Census Data).

Habitat Suitability

With extensive forested areas and a variety of habitat types in all ecoregions, most of Virginia can be considered potential turkey habitat. Only a few areas in Virginia with landscapes composed of very extensive open lands often associated with large agricultural fields (Fig. 9) or high human density from urbanization (Fig. 10) would be considered entirely unsuitable for turkeys. Wild turkeys have shown surprising adaptability, even in moderate development, to survive in a variety of conditions.

In order to establish a more accurate landscape-perspective of turkey habitat, a habitat suitability index (HSI) model was developed based on the forest, open land, and edge composition to provide a relative measure of turkey habitat quality in Virginia (Morris 2014). While this HSI model functioned admirably for management through 2022, staff recognized the need to revisit the HSI model and incorporate some minor changes to the current model along with corrections to account for recent landscape changes. The Conservation Management Institute at Virginia Tech was brought in to revamp this model in 2023. The newly revised model incorporated more up-to-date imagery, as well as methodology to match the newer technologies available for habitat mapping (Fig. 12). Additionally, the new version of the model incorporated a 1,500-meter grid system that allows a better measure of the habitat distribution across a county.

Optimal turkey habitat can be characterized by an appropriate mixing of diverse forests, interspersed with openings and agriculture. Less diversity of land cover and land use will generally be associated with lower quality turkey habitats. Cover types, from the most recent National Land Cover Database (2021), to include in the model were guided by turkey life history needs. For suitable turkey habitats, the HSI index could potentially range between 0 for the poorest turkey habitats and 1 for the best habitats.

The average county HSI value was 0.598 across all Virginia counties and ranged from a county high of 0.773 (Pittsylvania) to a low of 0.337 (Virginia Beach) (Appendix C). The

HSI model indicates that the better turkey habitats in Virginia are generally found in the southern Piedmont counties (Region 2), while the poorer turkey habitats occur in the mountainous areas of western Virginia (primarily western Region 4) and the highly urbanized areas (Fig. 13). The southern Piedmont is generally characterized by a high diversity of farmlands and forested stands that offer better turkey habitat than is found in the more continuous forest cover with little interspersion of openings in the western counties.

While the HSI is a valuable tool, it is a coarse scale management evaluation and as such may not adequately describe all turkey habitat that is available. Examples of the coarse level can be found in lands that are in managed forests. These areas provide many of the necessary habitat requirements due to varied forest structure, but because of the overall classification of the overstory stand, the score may not adequately represent the value to turkeys. As such, the model may in some cases under-represent the true habitat value. Similarly, lands that are open (and ranked highly by the model) may not be available to turkeys due to invasive pasture grasses or other thick vegetation, in these cases over-representing the habitat value. This model was developed as a tool to look at larger landscape level quality and as such may have limited utility for fine scale management.

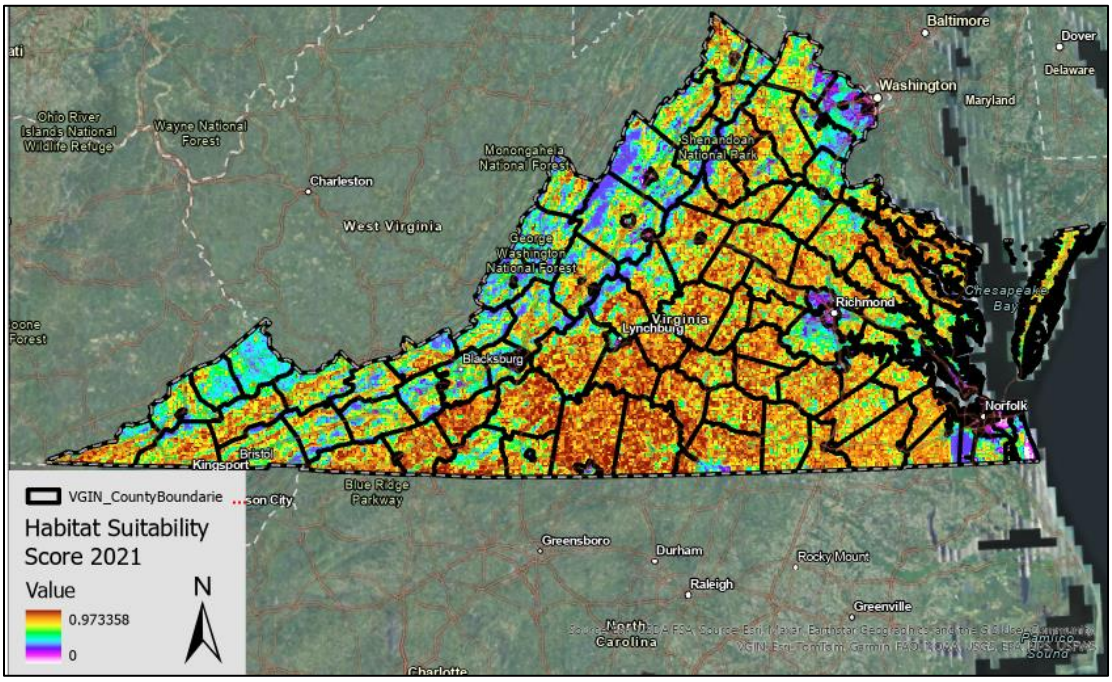


Figure 12. Habitat suitability for turkeys in Virginia (Virginia DWR 2024).

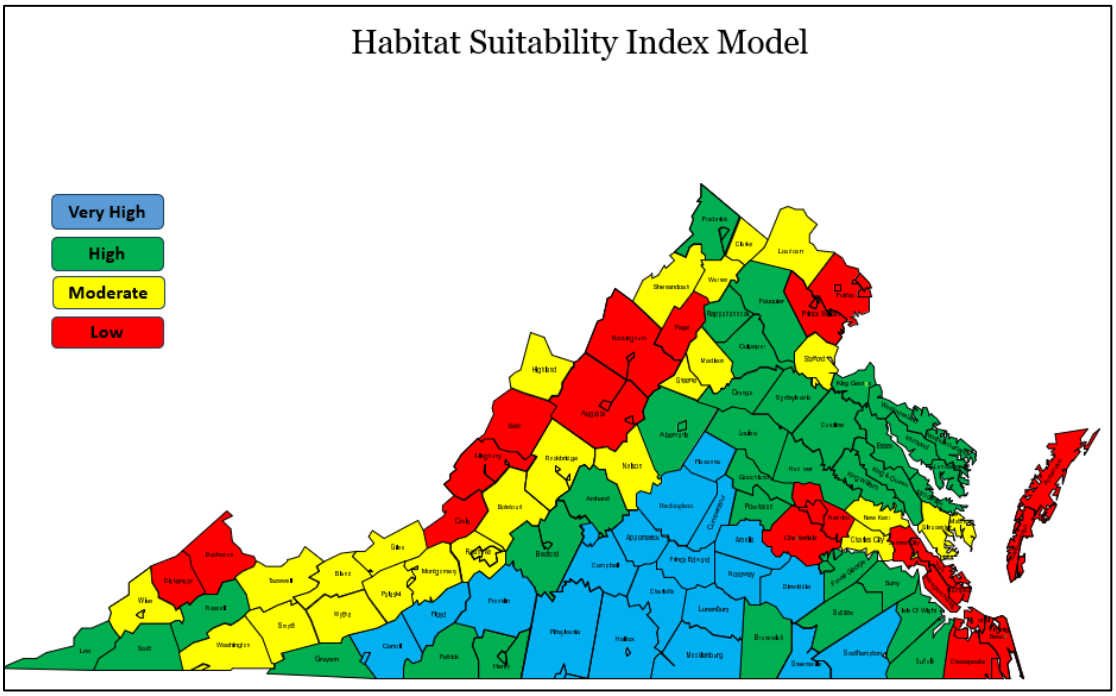


Figure 13. Habitat Suitability for wild turkey in Virginia arranged by mean county suitability cluster analysis.

Public Land Habitats

Private ownerships represent most (88%) of the suitable habitat for turkeys across Virginia, with 12% of the suitable habitats in public ownership. On a statewide basis, the largest public landowner is the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) with 2,569 $mi^2$ of suitable turkey habitat on National Forest lands; the USFS contains 65% of all public land that is suitable for turkeys in Virginia. The next largest public land ownerships include the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) (437 $mi^2$, 11% of all public land), U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) (418 $mi^2$, 11% of all public land), Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (VDWR) (275 $mi^2$, 7% of all public land), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) (159 $mi^2$, 4% of all public land), and other Virginia state lands (STATE) (105 $mi^2$, 3% of all public land).

The George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, whose ownership is restricted to the western part of Virginia, are an especially important resource for turkey-related recreation and habitat west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. On average, National Forest lands represent 20% of the total huntable habitat in the 30 counties that contain USFS properties and 93% of the public land open to hunting west of the Blue Ridge. Three counties have more than half of the suitable turkey habitat contained on public land: Craig (57%), Alleghany (52%), and Bath County (52%). National Forest lands account for over 84% of all suitable public land and over 90% of the huntable land west of the Blue Ridge.

Because of the importance of public land in western Virginia (and USFS properties in particular), habitat quality on public lands has become a source of controversy for citizens interested in the management of turkey and other wildlife species. Most publicly owned properties in western Virginia, including USFS and VDWR lands, are found on slopes and ridge

tops with poorer soils than the more fertile privately-owned valley lands. Therefore, public lands will almost always contain lower quality habitat than neighboring private lands.

Over the past decades, the vegetative characteristics on public lands have shifted towards increased coverage of closed canopy, older age forests that are of less value to turkey. While these closed canopy forests provide adequate roosting habitat and produce hard mast, they often exclude more beneficial shrubs and herbaceous plants through shading in the understory. The long-term changes in habitat conditions have likely had multiple causes, including changes in land management practices (e.g., reduced timber cutting, fire suppression), reduced staff working directly on lands for wildlife habitat management, forest maturation, and even deer herbivory, in some areas.

Wild turkeys thrive in areas with an abundance of diverse habitat types, those that are especially important are areas of early successional vegetative communities that are needed for nesting and brood rearing cover. Timber harvests and other forest disturbance (e.g., insect damage, fire) are often the main sources of this diversity on public lands. Timber harvests (e.g., clearcuts, shelterwood cuts, selection cuts, thinnings, salvage cuts) on National Forest lands have declined substantially since the peak five-year period (1985-89) when 5,983 acres (0.33%) were harvested annually. Even including other timber stand improvements (e.g., pre-commercial thinnings, removal of cull trees), only 9,946 acres (0.55%) were treated annually during peak years. Since this peak of activity in the 1980s, forest management activity has decreased substantially. Timber harvests on DWR lands have similarly declined over the past several decades, resulting in lower diversity of habitats on the WMAs, particularly in areas west of the Blue Ridge.

The use of prescribed fire has increased significantly on National Forest lands. Both prescribed and wildfires increase the abundance and diversity of succulent plants, improves insect abundance and increases production of soft mast. Longer-term habitat benefits may also be provided by fires that thin the canopy, allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor and stimulating more sustainable ground-level herbaceous cover (useful for brooding, nesting, and foraging). Recent research by The Nature Conservancy on National Forest lands in Virginia showed that 24% of burned areas resulted in open gaps in the forest canopy. The ultimate long-term success of prescribed fire for improving habitat quality will depend on many factors including site quality, stand condition, and fire intensity. From pre-European settlement in the 1700s through the 1930s when aggressive fire suppression began, wildfires were much more frequent and extensive. In some years, wildfires may continue to have significant impacts (e.g., 2012, 2024).

While it might seem obvious that declining habitat quality (and turkey abundance) on public land has been a direct result of the significant decreases in the peak timber harvest since the late 1980s, timber harvests on National Forest lands have never been an intensive management activity at the landscape level. Even at the peak during 1985-89, annual timber harvests still represented only an average of 0.33% of the landscape (i.e., a timber rotation of about 300 years). The timber rotation period is the time between establishing a stand of trees and when that stand is harvested. The best timber rotations for turkey management will depend on a variety of factors, but an optimal rotation period to benefit turkey habitat will typically be 125 years or shorter. As important as timber management is, it is unlikely that the historically low intensity of timber harvests on National Forests have ever produced large landscape benefits for turkey.

Even without active management of forests, natural disturbances such as wind, ice storms, disease, pests, fire, etc. will produce dispersed canopy gaps where some minimal level of forest diversity will be produced. However, the habitat potential for turkey will remain below the level that could be achieved with active forest management. Further, without management to improve habitat diversity on National Forests and State WMAs, it is unlikely that turkey populations can be sustained at levels to meet public demands for viewing and hunting.

## Wild Turkey Population Supply

### Population Densities

As with most wildlife species, no economically practical methods exist to accurately estimate actual turkey populations in Virginia. Previous research has shown that spring gobbler harvests and success by hunters are the best indices of turkey population trends and abundance. The primary sources of information about spring harvests and hunter success come from mandatory harvest reporting and periodic hunter surveys. Data from additional surveys of bow hunters and spring gobbler hunters are also used to monitor turkey population abundance.

While harvest data and hunter surveys are currently still the most common tools for measuring population trends in wild turkeys, questions of spatial and temporal variation in harvest pressure, hunting activity, and hunter behaviors are leading to the development of integrated population models and use of population reconstruction by some states. Continued research into these methods and comparisons to harvest trend indices will be necessary as declines in hunter numbers and changes in land use continue across Virginia. Additionally, datasets such as E-bird (Cornell Lab of Ornithology), breeding bird surveys (US Geological Survey), and other citizen science applications currently show confounding trends when compared to traditional harvest indices. Use of these novel datasets in conjunction with more traditional harvest methodologies will likely be needed in the future to fully understand wild turkey population dynamics and trends in a changing landscape (Chamberlain et al. 2022).

The number of spring gobblers killed per square mile of available habitat is used as a relative index to turkey population density. In order to account for annual fluctuations in harvest, the three-year average index is used. Available habitat for turkeys is defined as all areas except for locations considered barren land, herbaceous wetlands, and areas under human development as defined by the National Land Cover Database (NLCD). The 2021 NLCD dataset was used for the estimation of available habitat as it was the most recent dataset available at the time of publication. The Statewide 3-year average harvest index from 2022-2024 was 0.58 spring gobblers killed/ $mi^2$ of available habitat. By contrast, during the 2011 and 2012 spring hunting seasons, the statewide population density index was 0.44 spring gobblers killed/ $mi^2$ of suitable habitat. By region (Fig. 14, Table 1), the highest turkey densities occur in Tidewater (Region 1, 0.85 gobblers/$mi^2$), followed by the South Piedmont (Region 2, 0.55 gobblers/$mi^2$), Southwest Mountains (Region 3, 0.55 gobblers/$mi^2$), the North Mountain region (Region 4, 0.48 gobblers/$mi^2$), and the North Piedmont (Region 5, 0.47 gobblers/$mi^2$). Densities also vary among counties within regions (Fig. 15, Appendix C).

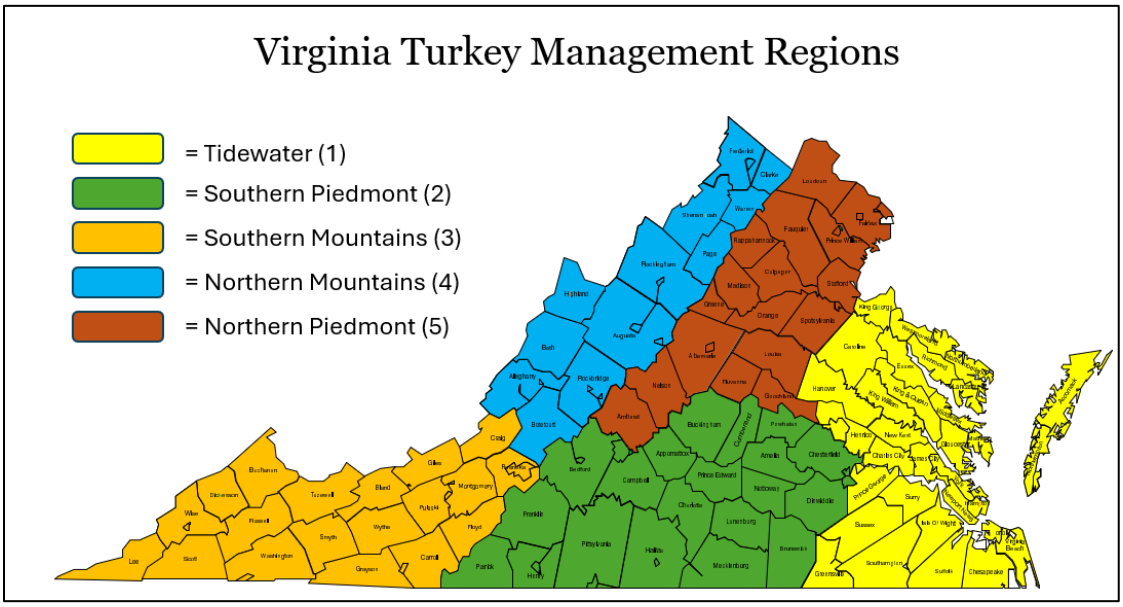


Figure 14. Virginia turkey management regions

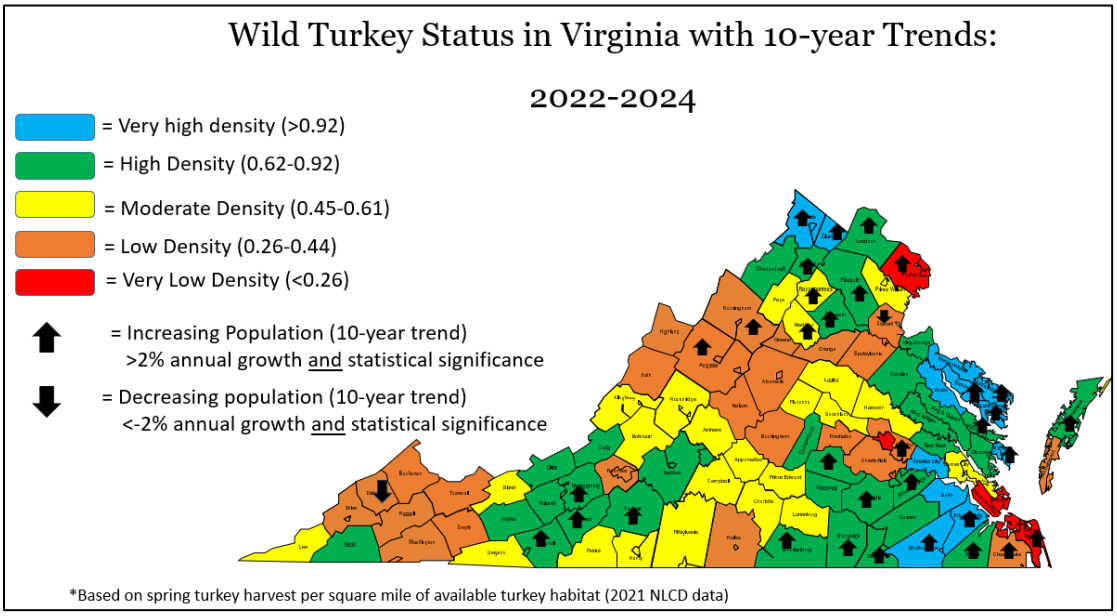


Figure 15. Relative densities of wild turkeys in Virginia based on the three-year average harvest of gobblers during spring hunting seasons from 2022-2024 per square mile of available habitat and 10-year regression of harvest data to determine long term population growth trajectories.

## Population Trends

Population trends are evaluated by estimating the annual rate of change in spring gobbler harvest over time (Appendix C). In addition to evaluations of the relative density discussed in the previous section, longer-term trends are evaluated using a linear regression analysis over a ten-year period. This allows tracking trends of the population over time that may be difficult to see due to the somewhat irregular harvest patterns of wild turkeys. These trends are monitored at the state and county levels annually.

Historically, the state-wide population index of spring gobbler harvest showed steady and rapid growth from 1961 through about 2002, with an average growth rate of 10% annually (Fig. 16). The population growth stabilized in the early 2000s at a harvest level around 15,000. Since 2014, the statewide population index indicates the population may be increasing slightly, although the trend is not statistically significant (annual rate of change = 2.52%, p = 0.053). While the population appears to be increasing slightly, these patterns are not uniform across the state. Population trends vary greatly across the state as productivity (often driven by weather and harvest patterns) differs across various regions (Fig. 15). The regional or localized population changes are often the source of frustration of hunters who see changes in local areas that may not show up at the county, region, or the state level. These changes in local populations may contribute to the perception that populations are out of balance or may be insufficient for meeting constituent needs.

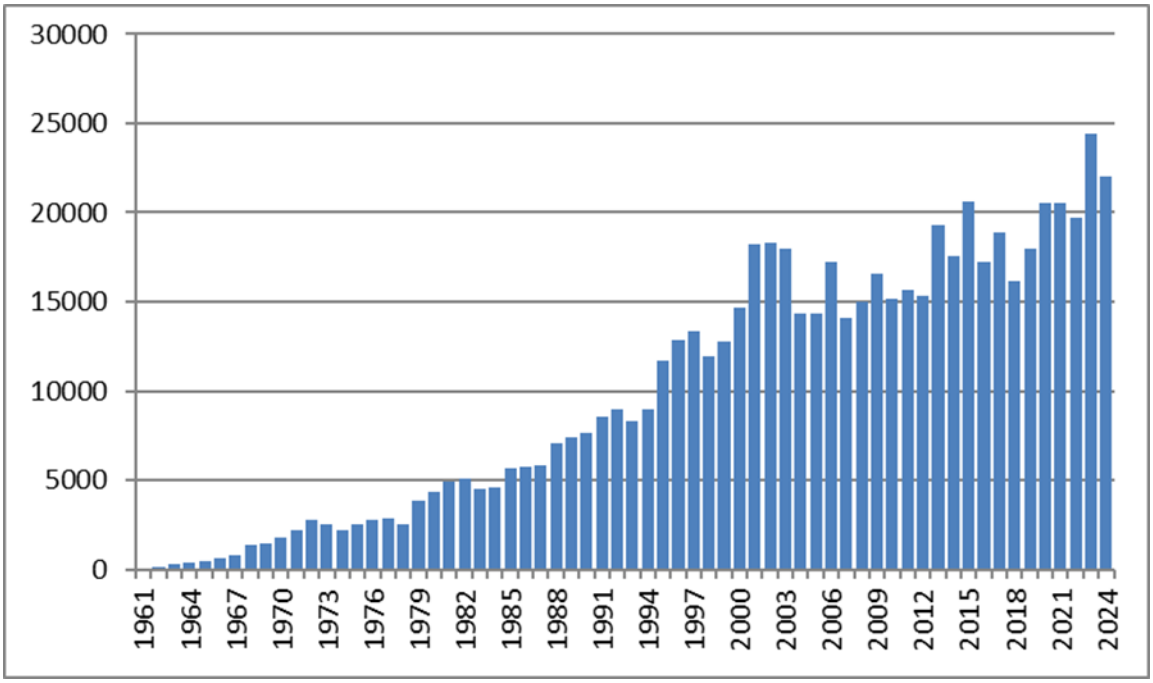


Figure 16. Virginia spring gobbler harvest as reported through mandatory check-in, 1961-2024.

Hunter survey data also provide several meaningful metrics for comparison of population growth. DWR Human Dimensions program staff conduct biennial surveys of a segment of the hunting license holders to gain insight into the attitudes and perceptions of hunters. The survey also serves to establish hunting effort and success data. One of the most

useful datapoints for monitoring trends over time is the average daily success rate. The results from the 2023-2024 Hunter Survey indicate that, on average, Virginia's spring turkey hunters harvest 0.065 gobblers per day of hunting, or said another way, it takes the average hunter approximately 15 days of hunting to harvest a gobbler. The average daily harvest has declined very slightly over the last two decades, but the trend is not statistically significant. During the mid-1980s, when populations were much lower, it took an average of 40 days of hunting to kill a gobbler when hunter success was about 0.025 gobblers killed per day. The daily success increased through the 1990s to about 0.04 gobblers per day (25 days to harvest a gobbler) as populations increased. During the early 2000s, the average daily success peaked at 0.075 (or 13 days to harvest a gobbler) in the 2004 season (Fig. 16). The 2023-24 Hunter Survey indicates that 35% of hunters were successful in the spring 2024 season, the highest hunter success rate reported on a hunter survey. Hunter success rates during the mid-1990s ranged from 22-25% depending on the year. Success rates have averaged 28% since 2012 (Fig. 18).

Hunter perceptions of turkey populations often differ from harvest or other survey data. The 2023-2024 Hunter Survey found that 45% of respondents felt turkey population in their area had declined or had declined dramatically, opposed to only 14% who felt the populations had increased or increased dramatically. The majority of respondents (55%) also indicated that they felt turkey populations in their area were too small, opposed to 37% who felt populations were just right, and only 3% who felt there were too many turkeys. A similar question was posed to turkey hunters in the 2023 Turkey Hunter Survey. Thirty-five percent of turkey hunters indicated that populations had declined or declined dramatically, while 23% indicated that populations had increased. This disparity between survey results collected within a 12-month period indicates varied opinions on the severity of potential declines but does outline the general trend of a perceived general decline in populations. There may be multiple factors influencing these responses, including considerable discussion of turkey declines in the Southeastern US, and decreases in poult productivity. This discrepancy between hunter attitudes and harvest or observation-based data suggests that the hunter attitudes and preferences may not track with harvest trends. This can increase the challenge of setting season or population objectives, as hunter attitudes may differ from harvest-based metrics or even observation data.

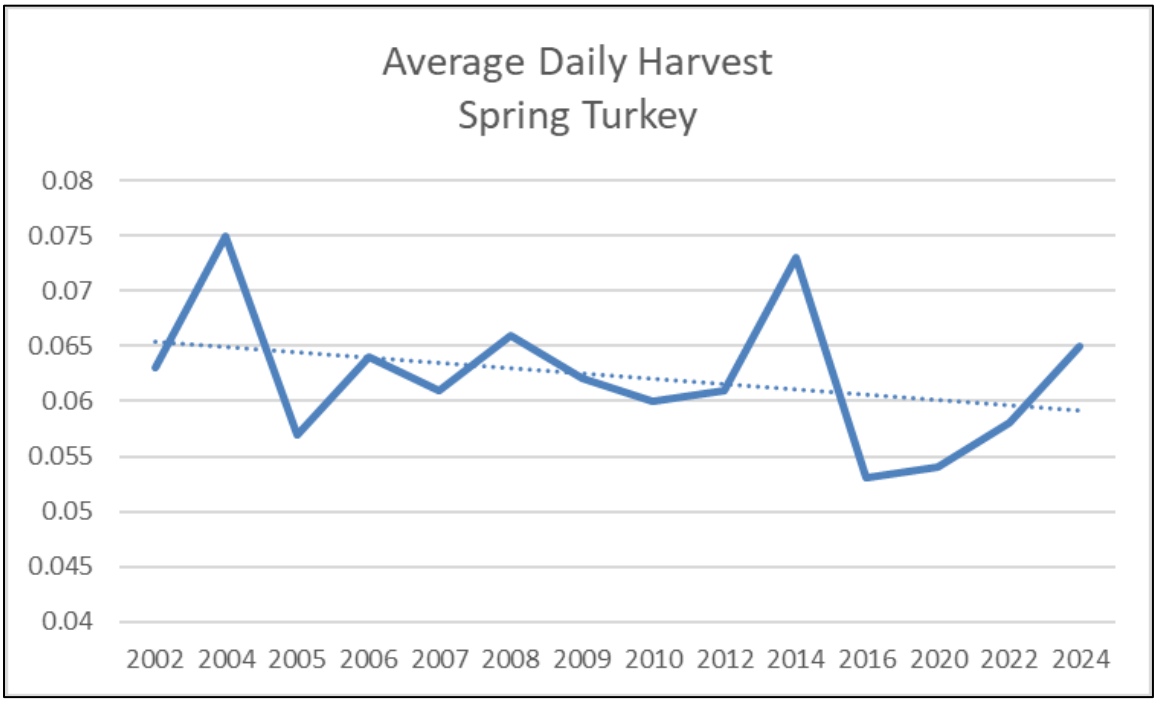


Figure 17. The average daily harvest of spring turkey hunters as reported in the biennial Hunter Survey between 2002 and 2024.

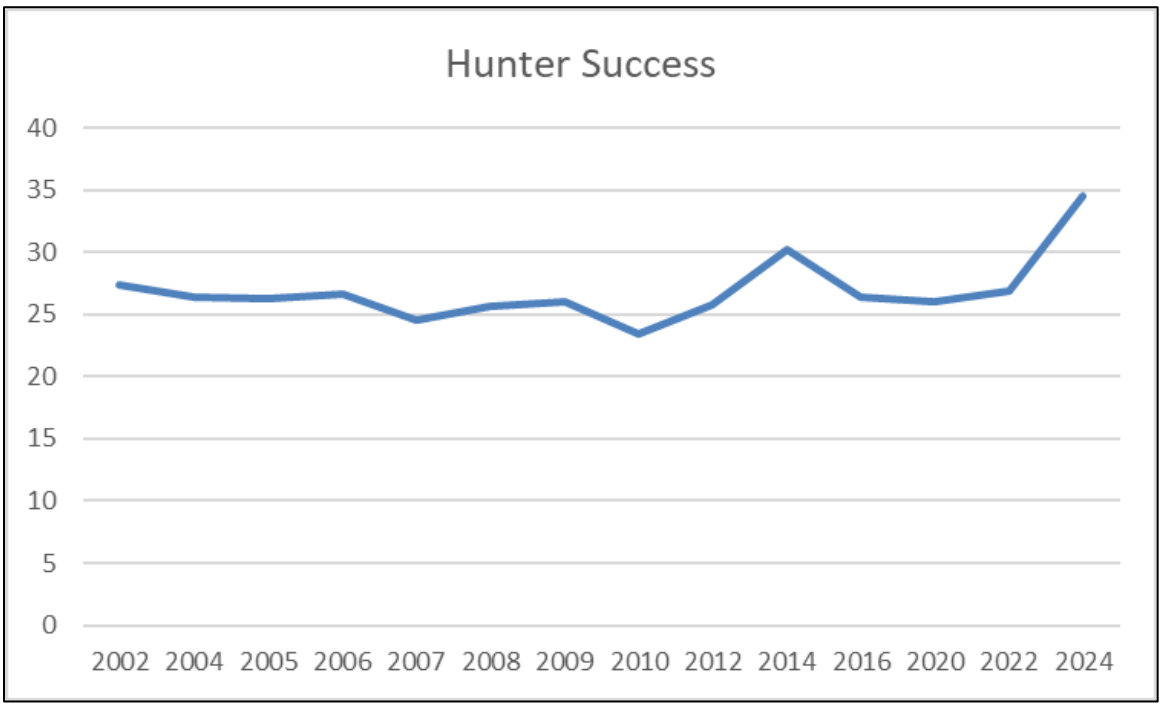


Figure 18. The spring turkey hunter success rate as reported in the biennial Hunter Survey between 2002 and 2024.

Although the statewide turkey population growth rate has stabilized, population trends are variable by region and by county (Appendix C). Generally, turkey populations are increasing in the Tidewater (Region 1) and in the North Mountain Region (Region 4). Populations have stabilized in the South Piedmont (Region 2), North Piedmont (Region 5), and Southwest Mountain (Region 3) portions of the state (Table 1). Within regions, county-level trends also are variable (Fig. 15, Appendix C). While only two counties are currently showing a statistically significant downward trend, several others do indicate a downward trend that has not yet reached the statistically significant threshold (Appendix C).

Table 1. Ten-year population trend data for turkey management regions with a three-year average density.

| Region | 10 Year Trend | | | 2022-2024 Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % Annual Change | P-Value | R-Square | Kill/Mi$^2$ Available Turkey Habitat |
| Region 1 (Tidewater) | 4.58 | 0.002 | 0.71 | 0.846 |
| Region 2 (S. Piedmont) | 1.21 | 0.393 | 0.09 | 0.547 |
| Region 3 (SW Mountains) | 0.74 | 0.445 | 0.08 | 0.546 |
| Region 4 (N Mountains) | 4.41 | 0.027 | 0.48 | 0.482 |
| Region 5 (N Piedmont) | 2.8 | 0.147 | 0.24 | 0.473 |
| Statewide | 2.52 | 0.053 | 0.39 | 0.583 |

Annual bowhunter surveys also provide additional information regarding turkey populations. During fall archery hunting seasons, bowhunters are recruited to report observations of animals they see while afield hunting. Although these hunters are primarily hunting deer, they observe a diverse number of species largely due to the sedentary hunting style most bowhunters employ. The statewide turkey observations provide an index to gauge the turkey population trajectory over time. The statewide observations per 100 hours of hunting has remained stable at both the 10 (2013-2022) and 20 year (2002-2022) periods (Fig. 19).

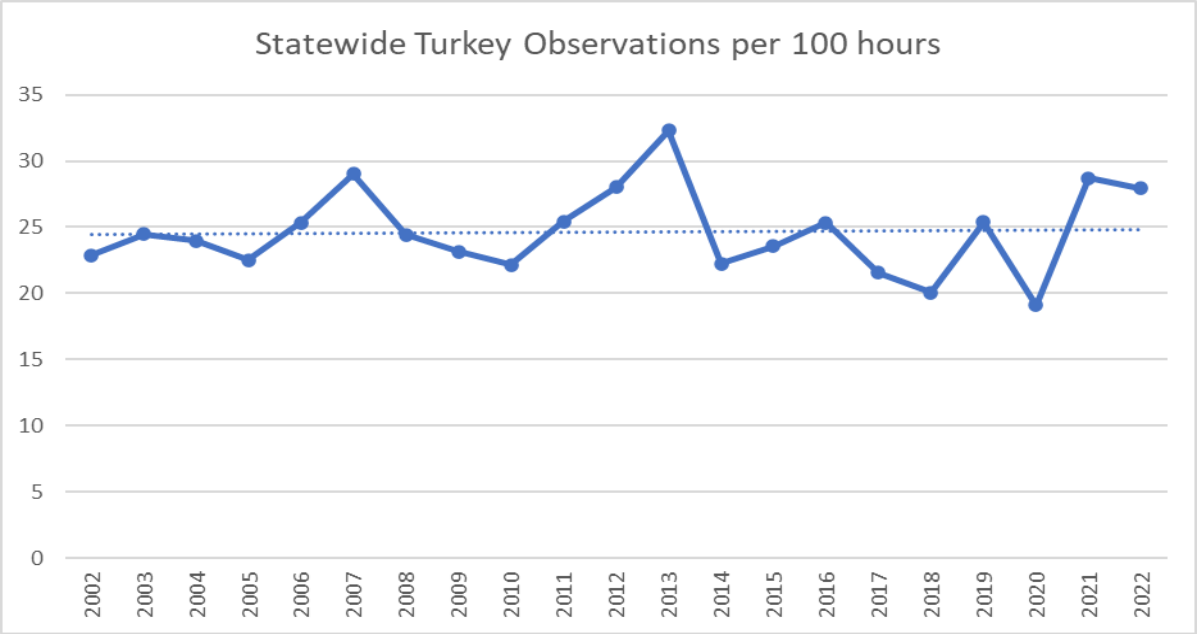


Figure 19. Statewide observations of turkeys from the Bowhunter Survey per 100 hours of observation.

While harvest and hunter-based surveys remain the core methods for ascertaining population status, the concern over declining hunting license sales creates the need for metrics outside of traditional hunting methodologies. Additional trend information can be obtained from other surveys that have not historically been utilized for game species management, such as the breeding bird survey and E-bird reports. The breeding bird survey has been run annually by the United States Geological Survey since 1966. The survey uses defined routes where trained observers identify any birds that are observed or heard along their survey routes. The breeding bird survey trend for Virginia shows a stable trend over the last 10 years (Fig. 20). This trend appears to be similar to our statewide harvest estimates, providing increased confidence in the utility of harvest as a predictor of population status. E-bird, however, is a newer data collection tool where birders can report observations to a central repository which can then be analyzed for trend information. The E-bird option is still in its infancy but may provide significant options for following trend data moving into the future. Current E-bird data show variable trends in portions of the state but may be heavily influenced by birding observations.

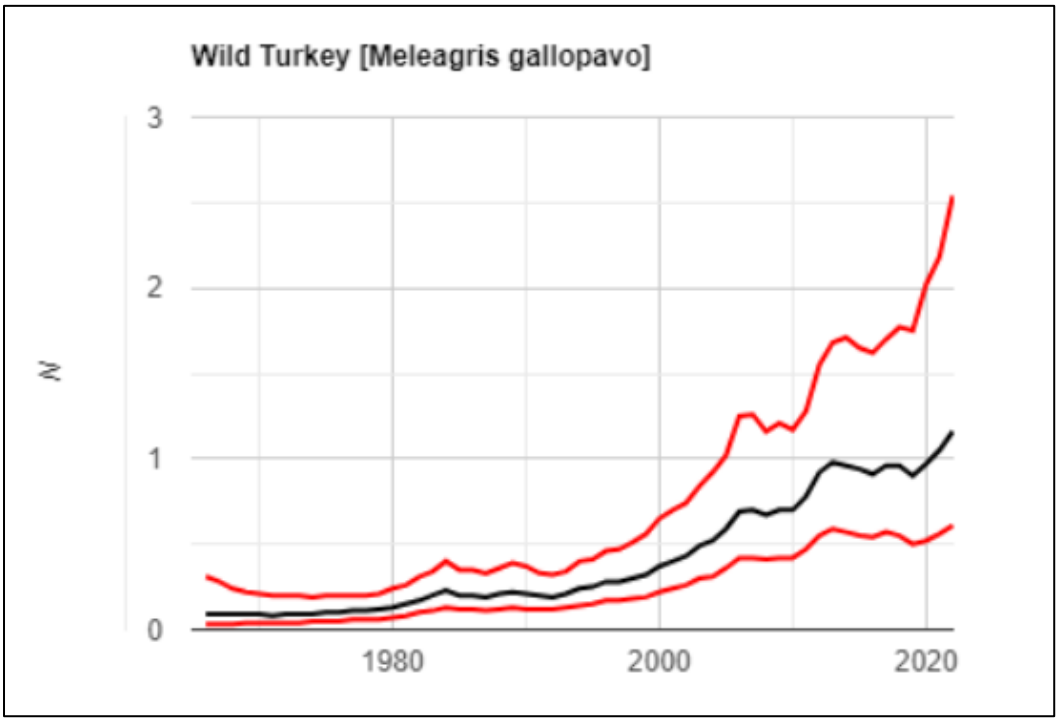


Figure 20. Breeding bird survey data from 1966 to 2022 for wild turkey.

Public Land Population Trends

Turkey population status on Virginia's public lands can be challenging to monitor with precision. There are many factors that can influence public land populations, including habitat quality (see section on Public Land Habitat), hunting pressure, disturbance during nesting or brood rearing season, among other factors. All of these may factor into effectiveness of specific methods for tracking populations over time.

As with turkey population status for the remainder of the state, hunter harvest trends provide the most reliable index to population size on public lands. Public land harvests in Virginia tend to be dominated by harvests on the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests as these lands encompass 92% of the public hunting land west of the Blue Ridge and approximately 73% of the total public hunting land in Virginia. In general, harvests on the National Forest have followed the statewide trends with relatively stable harvests over the past decade (2014-2024) in the spring, and declining harvests in the fall (Fig. 21). However, National Forest lands have experienced harvest declines overall since the mid-1990s in both fall and spring harvests. While habitat quality has often been implicated as a driving factor in that decline, hunting pressure may also play a pivotal role.

Because hunting pressure and effort can greatly influence harvest rates, it is important to understand hunter trends in relation to harvest. Tracking the number of hunters using the National Forest can be difficult as there are no specific license or stamps required to turkey hunt on public lands. The National Forest Stamp is required of all users who hunt or fish on the National Forest so using trends in Stamp sales provides some indication to hunting pressure (but does not identify specific turkey hunters). National Forest Stamp sales have experienced a general decline over the past 30 years, but specifically the Stamp sales declined significantly

(4.1% annually) through the period from 2002-2012. This decline in the early 2000s, resulted in a decrease of approximately 35,000 users on the National Forest. It is unclear how many of those users would have been turkey hunters so the overall impact cannot be directly tied to hunter effort. However, overall turkey harvests (spring and fall seasons combined) on the National Forest declined at almost 7% annually during this same period of time. Harvests have stabilized since 2012 on National Forest lands; however, the harvests have not returned to levels observed in the late 1990s or early 2000s (Fig. 21). Similarly, Stamp sales seem to have stabilized over the past decade, but total Stamp sales have decreased by almost 71,000 since 1994.

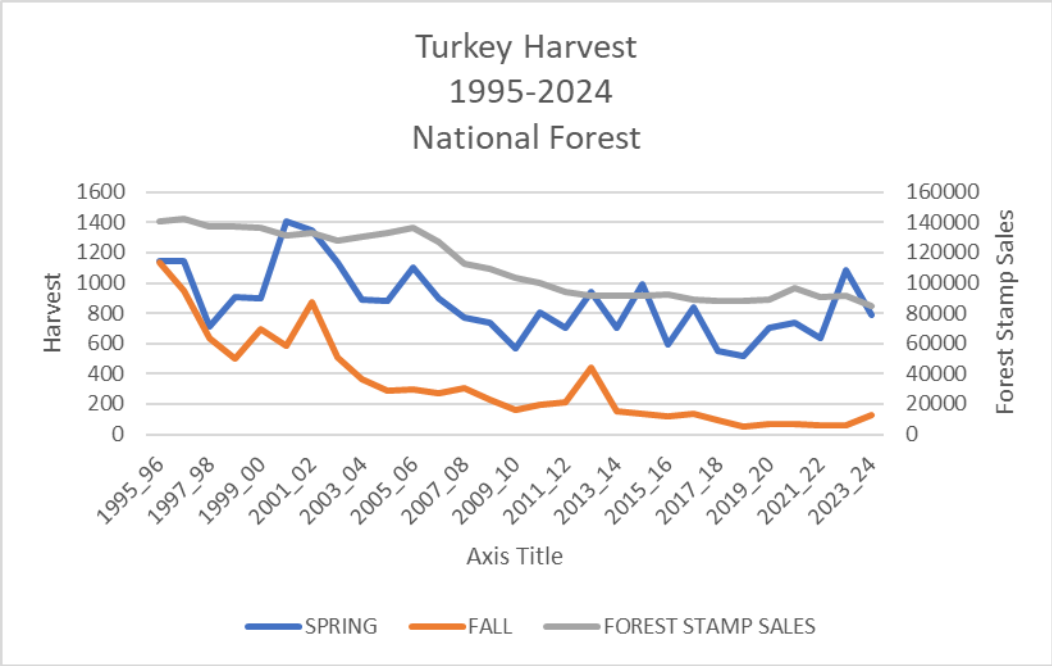


Figure 21. Spring and fall turkey harvest on the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in Virginia from 1995-2024.

While these potential changes in hunter effort likely affect harvests, the population index (spring harvest/mi$^2$ of available habitat) can provide some meaningful insight into populations on the National Forest. The three-year average (2022-2024) spring turkey harvest per square mile of available habitat on National Forest lands is 0.28, considerably lower than the private land statewide average of 0.61 turkeys/mi$^2$ of available habitat. Populations on the National Forest are generally considered to be below the desired population levels, and as such are often the subject of frustration from public land turkey hunters.

Other federal lands that allow harvest of turkeys in Virginia are predominately made up of military installations (e.g., Marine Corps Base Quantico, Fort Walker) and US Army Corp of Engineers (e.g., Kerr Reservoir, Philpott Reservoir) lands. Of these lands, military installations make up the majority of the remaining federal land harvests in Virginia (excluding National Forest lands). Due to security concerns, most military installations have traditionally monitored harvests and hunting effort to a much finer detail than other public lands. These military installations generally provide good mosaics of turkey habitat and often have robust turkey populations. The average population density index of these lands over the past three years (2002-2024) is 0.47 turkeys/mi$^2$ of available habitat, slightly below the statewide private land

average (0.61 turkeys/mi$^2$ of available habitat). The population index on these lands have remained stable over the past several decades.

State lands make up the remainder of the public land turkey harvest. For this section, WMAs operated by the VDWR and State Forests operated by the Virginia Department of Forestry are grouped together as they often follow similar trends and are grouped in the harvest reporting system. These lands tend to be managed more specifically for wildlife and timber resources, so they often have higher amounts of early and young successional forests and open lands, which are ideal for turkeys. These lands however are often smaller parcels and can be heavily hunted, often resulting in higher-than-average hunting pressure. However, estimating hunting pressure on these lands is difficult. Generally, the fall harvest has declined on state lands similar to trends statewide; however, the spring turkey harvest has remained fairly stable over the past couple of decades (Fig 22). The population index for state lands averaged 0.77 turkeys/mi$^2$ of available turkey habitat, exceeding the population index for private and federal lands. While the habitat may provide some improvements over other lands, the increased hunting pressure on WMA and State Forest lands is likely the main reason this index is slightly higher.

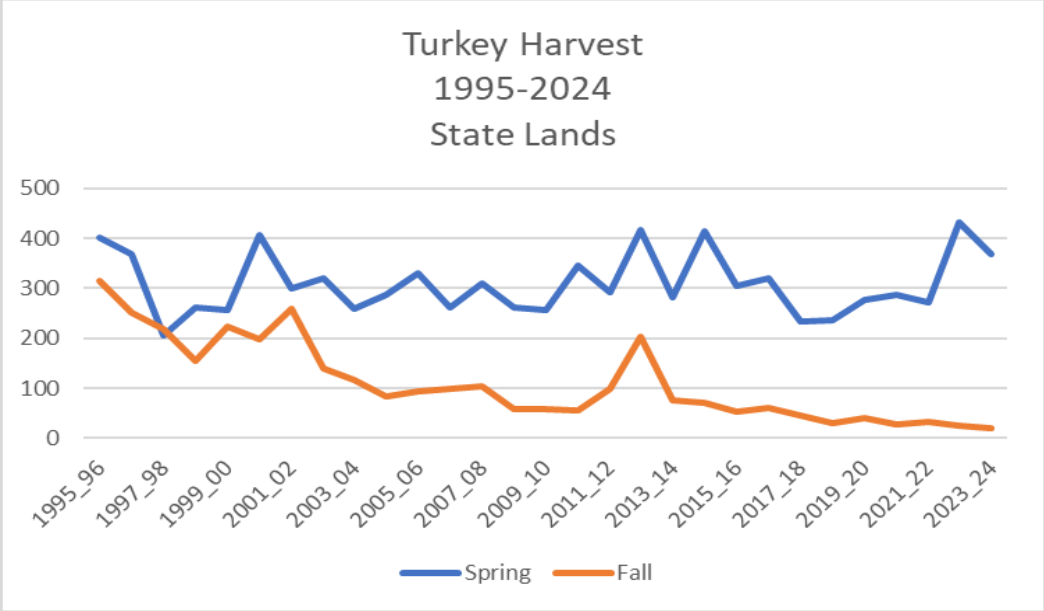


Figure 22. Spring and fall turkey harvest on state lands (WMAs and State Forests) in Virginia from 1995-2024.

Productivity

From 1958 until 2010 turkey productivity (defined as the number of poults per adult hen) was primarily measured utilizing fall feather collections from hunter harvested birds (Fig. 23). At its peak, productivity averaged 3.5-4 poults per hen (1978; hereafter: pph) but fell to an average of 2 pph statewide by 2010. Due to shifting trends in turkey harvests between the fall and spring seasons (decline in fall season harvests versus significant increases in spring season harvests) using fall feather collections has become a less accurate index of productivity. Beginning in 2007, a summer turkey brood survey was initiated to measure productivity based

on turkey sightings categorized by age and sex (Fig. 24). Methods used in this survey were created and standardized across the Southeast in 2014 (SE Wild Turkey Working Group) and adopted by most southeastern states by 2017. During the 2018 NWTF technical committee meeting the standardized survey methods was adopted nationwide to be used throughout the range of the wild turkey (NWTF 2019).

While productivity can vary significantly from year to year based on a variety of factors (e.g., weather, fall mast crops) the long-term statewide average of 2.6 pph was maintained from 2007 until 2020 (Fig 24). By 2023 the long-term statewide average fell to 2.4 pph. The annual index has fluctuated significantly over the past 10 years, from a survey low of 1.6 pph in 2018 to 2.7 pph in 2021. The index has declined 1.3% annually over the past 10 years although the trend is not statistically significant ($R^2$= 0.046, p = 0.581). Generally, ratios of above 2 pph indicates populations are stable or increasing, while pph ratios below 2 suggest that populations may be declining. However, these benchmarks may not hold true as populations have expanded in many areas and the influence of productivity on population status likely varies with hen survival (when hen survival is high, productivity is less influential in population regulation and when hen survival is low, productivity is more influential in population regulation). Reasons for this decline in productivity are unknown although habitat and weather patterns likely play important roles. Turkey populations in Virginia may also be exhibiting some measure of density dependence in certain regions wherein population growth rates slow as the overall population size increases.

Because the brood survey is largely conducted by staff as they are conducting their normal business, there is concern that as workloads, staffing, and responsibilities shift the opportunity to observe turkeys may be diminished. For example, as counties become more urbanized, staff may be spending less time working in rural areas where they are likely to encounter turkeys. This shift may appear in the survey results as a decrease in observations but may be related to changing work obligations in place of shifts in productivity. Additionally, the survey is currently only generating a long-term average of 141 observations per year, below the 200 observations that are needed to draw significant statistical inferences. The number of observations has improved over the last 5 years as staff have worked to enhance survey participation. Staff are currently working to expand the survey to include a public facing survey in an effort to increase sample size and reduce variability in data. While shifting to public-facing surveys has its own set of challenges, the increased sample size has the potential to drastically improve the long-term utility of the survey.

Not unlike what has happened in Virginia, turkey populations in many states (particularly in the southeastern US) have experienced largely unexplained decreases in recruitment, often associated with overall population declines. While the overall supply of turkeys has been restored to record levels, new challenges exist to better understand and manage turkeys in the face of changes and future uncertainties. On-going research in the region is significantly reducing the knowledge gaps for the species and is leading to improvements in management strategies.

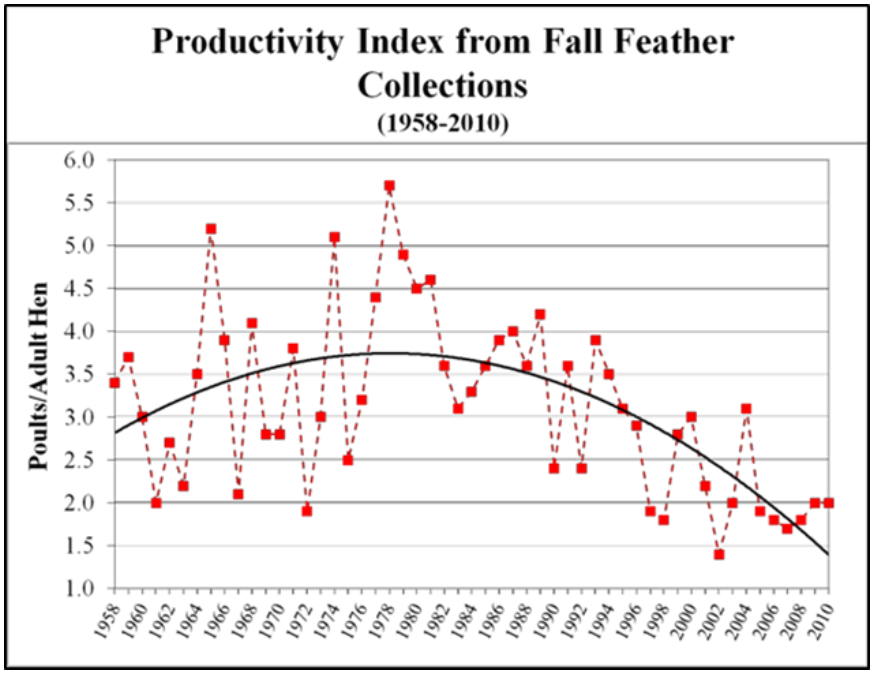


Figure 23: Productivity and fall recruitment indices (poults per adult in the harvest) from feather collections of fall-harvested turkeys (1958-2010).

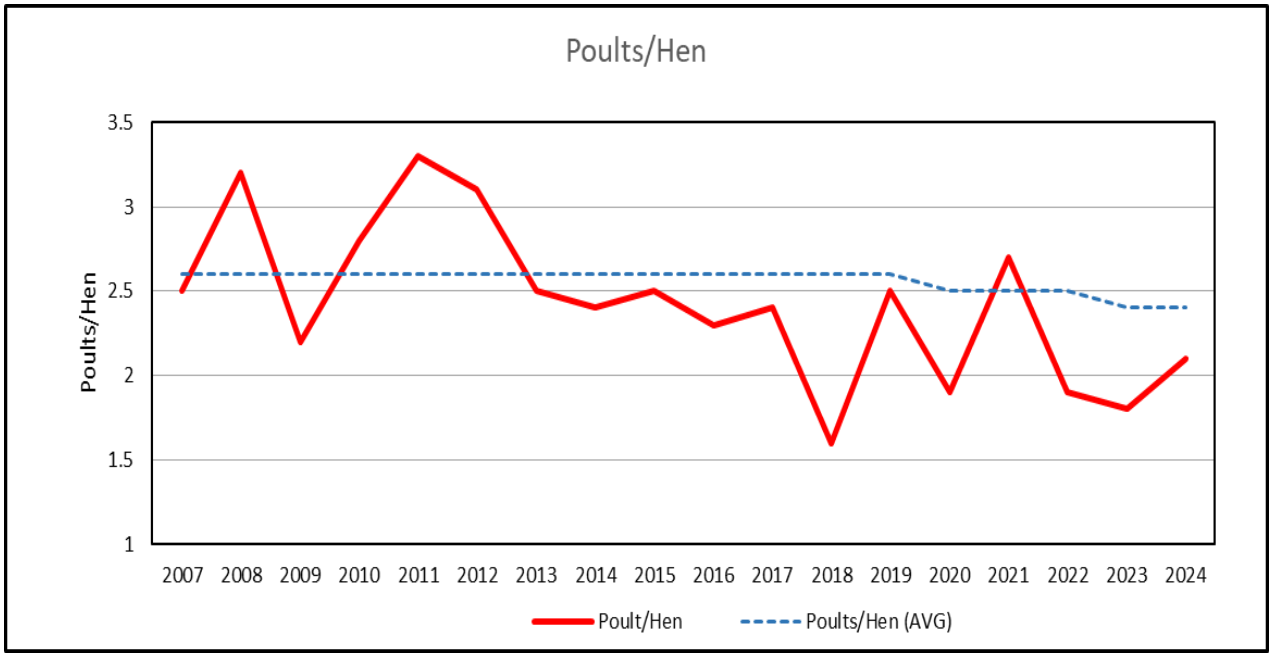


Figure 24: Turkey productivity index (poults/hen) estimated through annual brood survey, 2007-2024.

Predation

One of the most discussed aspects of turkey population management, especially among Virginia's hunters, is the concern around turkey predator populations. In the 1989 - 1994 study of hen turkeys in Virginia, predation was cited as the highest source of mortality with 52% of all mortalities being attributed to predation (only 12% to legal hunting). In that study, mammals (primarily bobcats) were the main source of mortality, accounting for 28% of all mortalities. There has been considerable concern among the hunting community that predator populations have increased dramatically and are now creating management concerns for turkey populations. Hunter perception of increased predator populations often fuel these concerns.

The Virginia Bowhunter Survey provides general population data for a multitude of species. The survey participants are asked to report all wildlife species they see or encounter while hunting during the archery season. These observations provide an index to the general population and are most useful for tracking trends over time. The most common species of concern to Virginia's turkey hunters are generally raccoon, coyote, bobcat, and fox as these species are often implicated in nest predation or are active predators of adult turkeys. Since 2002 when the survey began, except for coyote, all major mammalian predator observations have remained stable or have decreased slightly (Fig. 25). These data suggest that except for coyote populations, the predator context within Virginia has remained relatively static over the past decade.

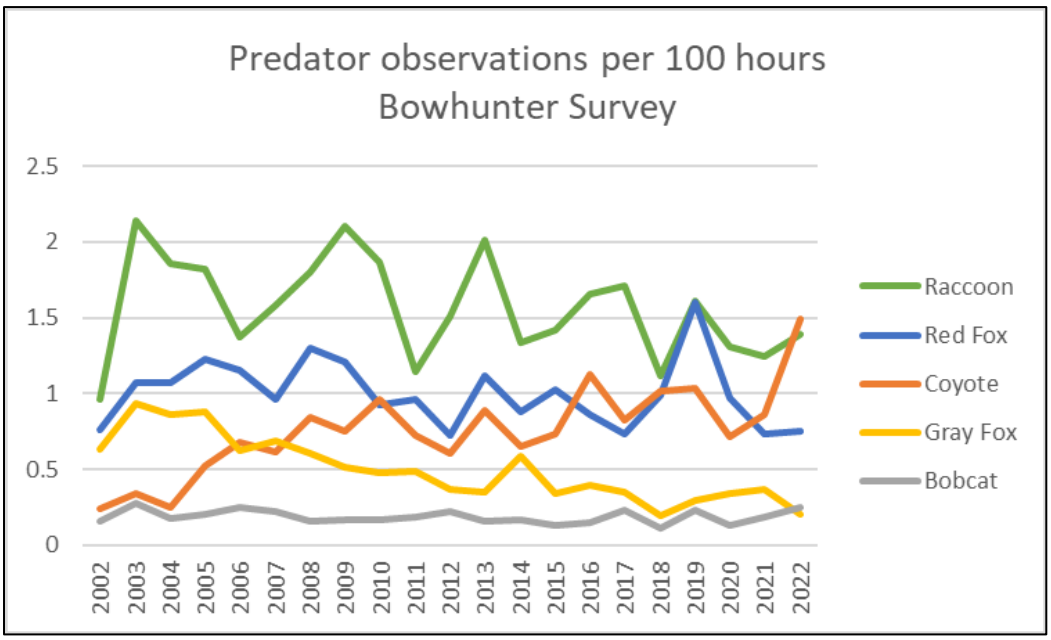


Figure 25. Observations of most common predators of wild turkeys per 100 hours of observation in the Virginia Bowhunter Survey from 2002-2022.

**DEMAND**

## Turkey Hunting Demands

Turkey hunting is an extremely popular form of hunting in Virginia and second only to white-tailed deer hunting. During the 2021-2022 hunting seasons (fall and spring seasons combined), 39% of all hunters were turkey hunters, compared to 82% that were deer hunters and 20% that were squirrel hunters. An estimated 73,079 hunters spent 554,198 hunter-days turkey hunting during the 2021-2022 hunting seasons.

Hunters generally pursue turkeys using four different approaches: (1) gobbler-only hunting during the spring and/or either-sex hunting during the fall that includes (2) hunters who specifically pursue turkeys without the use of dogs, (3) hunters who specifically pursue turkeys with the use of dogs, or (4) hunters who take turkeys while pursuing other species. When asked about how important different forms of hunting were to them, 2021-2022 hunters felt that deer hunting was most important, with spring turkey hunting and fall turkey hunting rating second and third most important, respectively. Bear hunting was fourth most important to hunters.

### Fall Turkey Hunting Demands.

*Fall hunting effort and harvest*.

In 1938, fall turkey hunting was the most popular form of hunting in Virginia, followed by grouse and bear hunting. By 2021-2022, the interest in fall turkey hunting had fallen behind deer, spring turkey, and coyote (in decreasing order).

During the 2021-2022 fall hunting seasons, 15% of hunters were fall turkey hunters. This represents a significant decrease from the number of fall turkey hunters in 2011, when 22% of all hunters were fall turkey hunters. An estimated 28,931 hunters spent 135,356 hunter-days turkey hunting during fall 2021-2022. Because fall turkey hunting opportunities overlap with many other hunting seasons in Virginia, it is often difficult to distinguish among the different types of fall turkey hunter (i.e., those who target turkeys without dogs, target turkeys with dogs, or take the opportunity to kill a turkey while hunting other species). In a 2023 survey of turkey hunters, 19% of hunters indicated they hunted specifically for turkey, 33% hunted turkey while primarily hunting other species (opportunistic hunters), and 19% indicated that they hunted other species while specifically hunting turkeys.

About 4% of all fall hunters used dogs to hunt turkeys in a 2023 survey of turkey hunters and would probably be classified as serious or avid fall hunters. Fall hunting turkeys with dogs has a long history in Virginia and early turkey dog breeding efforts can be traced to Virginia hunters. In the 2023 survey of turkey hunters, 17% of the respondents indicated that the opportunity to hunt with dogs was “Important” or “Very Important”.

Based on the 2023 survey of turkey hunters, most fall hunters (71%) used a shotgun to hunt fall turkeys. Less commonly used weapons by fall hunters were rifles (27%), archery equipment (bows and crossbows combined, 45%), and muzzleloaders (21%; hunters could select multiple weapons).

Despite increasing turkey populations, the number of fall turkey hunters (Fig. 26) and hunter-days of effort (Fig. 27) have been declining since the early 1990s. Separating the fall turkey season from the deer firearms season between 1989 and 1995 decreased the

opportunistic harvest of turkeys and may also have contributed to the initial decline of fall turkey hunters. Concurrent with the declining hunter interest has been a decline in the harvests of fall turkeys, even after reaching a record high kill of 16,861 birds in 1990 (Fig. 28).

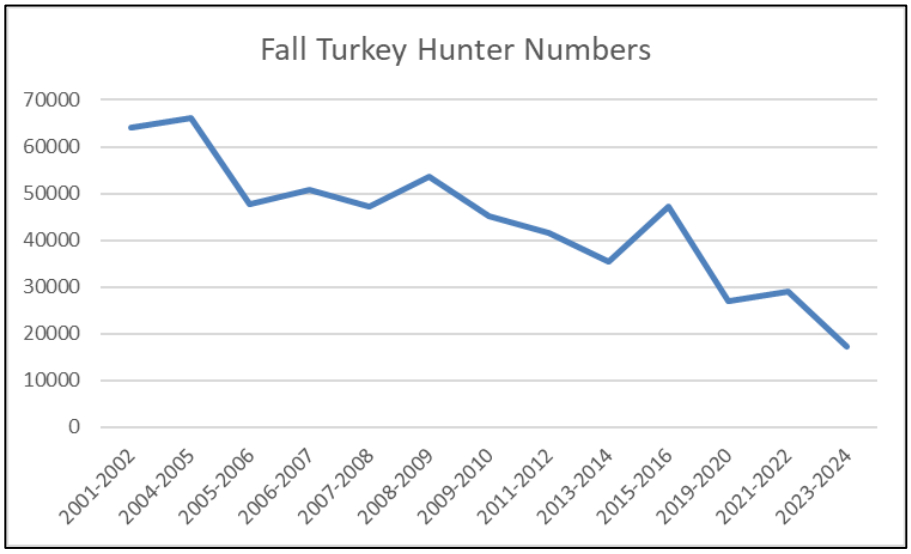


Figure 26. Estimated number of fall turkey hunters in Virginia from hunter surveys, 2001-2024.

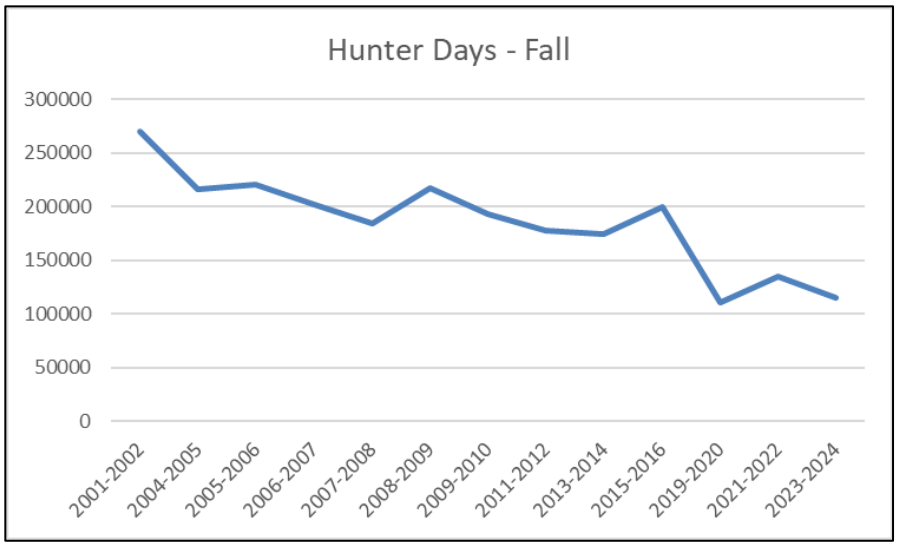


Figure 27. Estimated number of hunter-days spent fall turkey hunting in Virginia from hunter surveys, 2001-2024.

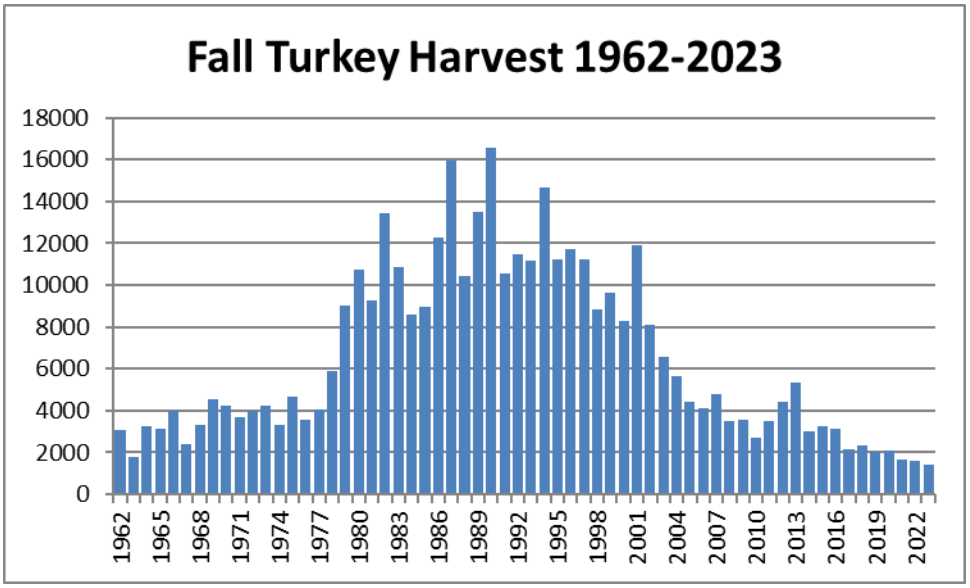


Figure 28. Virginia fall turkey harvest as reported through mandatory check-in system, 1962-2023.

A 2023 survey of spring turkey hunters that did not hunt fall turkeys showed that decreasing interest in fall turkey hunting was related to preference for spring hunting and an increased interest in hunting other species in the fall (likely deer). Many spring turkey hunters appear unwilling to utilize their turkey tags during the fall season, preferring to use the tags during the spring turkey season. In addition to a preference for spring hunting, the increased interest in deer hunting over the past 2 decades has also affected the traditional fall season participation.

The fall hunting season harvest has traditionally made up the bulk of the overall annual turkey harvest (Fig. 29). As hunter preferences and competing interests have shifted, so has the distribution of the annual turkey harvest. Prior to the 1995 hunting season, most of the harvest occurred during fall hunting seasons. Since 1995, the spring season has made up the majority of the overall turkey harvest. Although the total turkey harvest has remained fairly stable over the last several decades, the proportion of the annual turkey harvest occurring during the fall season has decreased.

*Fall hunting satisfactions.*

Hunter satisfactions are often assumed to be highest when harvest and/or the number of days spent hunting are maximized. However, recreational satisfaction is more complex and includes many other elements of the hunting experience that extend beyond success and effort. As an aggregate measure of the multiple components of satisfactions, a hunter satisfaction index has monitored the quality of fall turkey hunting experiences since 1993. Periodic hunter surveys have posed the question, "*overall, how do you rate the quality of your [current year] fall turkey season?*", with responses on a 7-point scale where 1= poor, 4=adequate, and 7= excellent. Average hunter satisfaction with fall hunting quality have declined since 1993 when quality was nearly adequate (3.93) to a low (3.39) after the 2009 fall season. One of the objectives of the 2014 Virginia Turkey Management Plan for the Turkey-Related Recreation

goal was to improve the fall turkey hunter satisfaction rating. Fall turkey hunters in 2021, indicated a satisfaction rating of 3.5 but this is within the standard error of the survey results indicating no statistically significant change in the satisfaction rating.

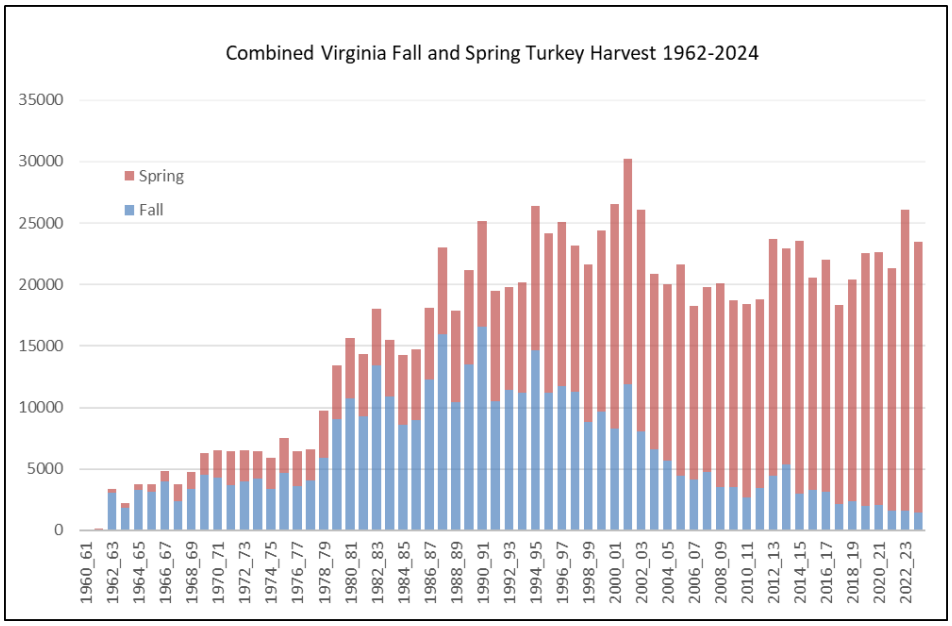


Figure 29. Fall and spring turkey hunting harvests through mandatory check-in system by license year, 1961-2024.

## Spring Turkey Hunting Demands

*Spring hunting effort and harvest.*

During the 2022 spring gobbler hunting season, 34% of all licensed hunters participated as spring turkey hunters. An estimated 62,747 hunters spent 418,846 hunter-days turkey hunting during spring 2022. Most turkeys were harvested with shotguns (93%). Rifles accounted for 6% of the harvest with the balance from bows, pistols, and muzzleloaders. Based on a 2023 survey of turkey hunters, most hunters (96%) used a shotgun to hunt spring gobblers. Less common weapons used by spring hunters were archery equipment (14%, vertical and crossbow combined), rifles (7%), muzzleloaders (1%), and other (1%) [hunters could select multiple options].

Contrary to perception of many turkey hunters, the numbers of spring turkey hunters (Fig. 30) and effort (hunter days, Fig. 31) have remained relatively stable since the early 1990s. Trends in either hunter numbers or effort are not statistically significant when looking at the longer term or during the previous turkey plan period (2013-2022). Due in part to licensing structure, it is difficult to track trends of hunters participating in various turkey seasons. Spring harvest totals increased significantly through the early 1980s and into the early 2000s when harvests stabilized (Fig. 16). Over the last decade, harvests appear to be increasing slightly, although the increase in harvests are not statistically significant (Table 1).

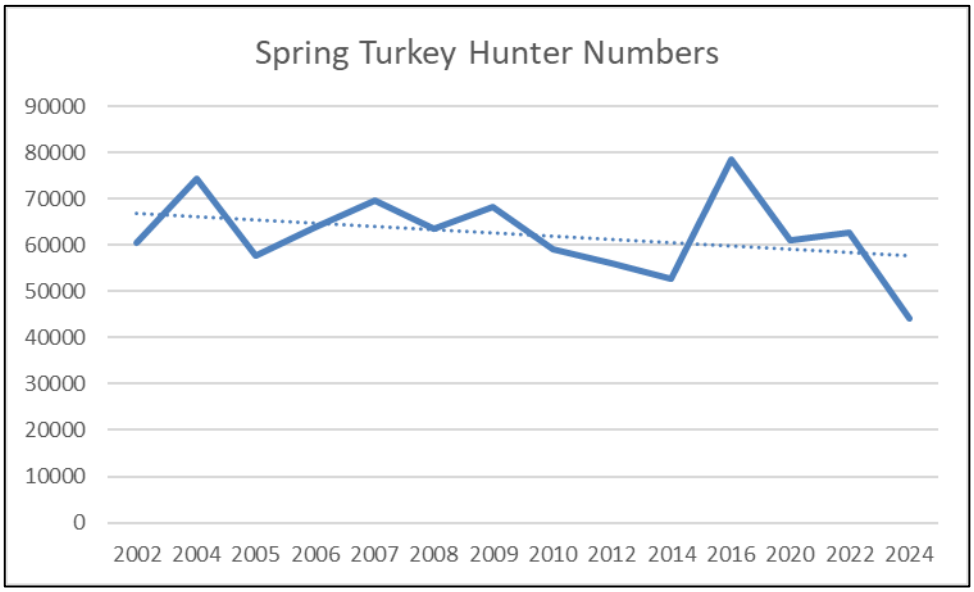


Figure 30. Estimated number of spring turkey hunters in Virginia from hunter surveys, 2002-2024.

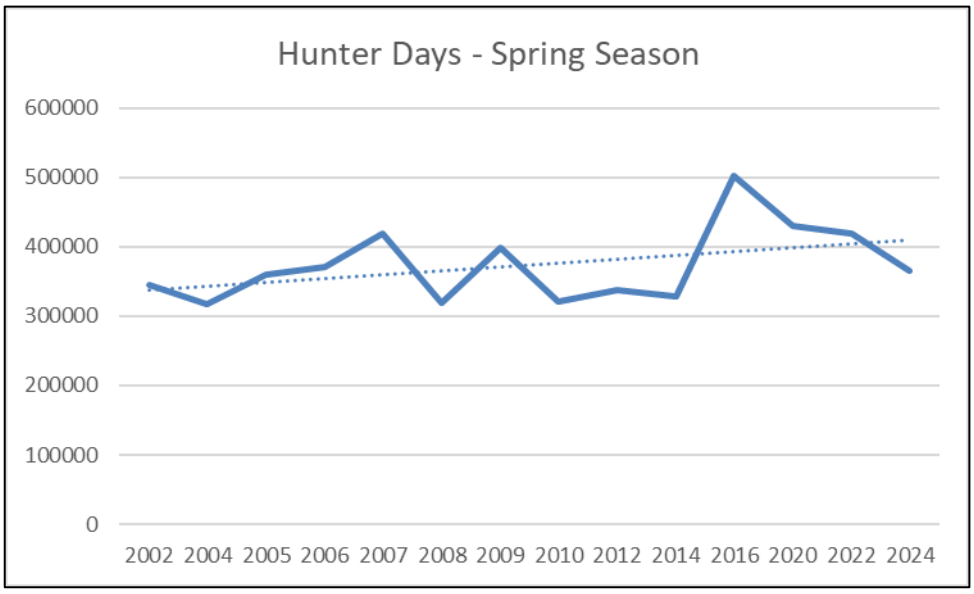


Figure 31. Number of hunter-days spent spring turkey hunting in Virginia from hunter surveys, 2002-2024.

Beginning in 2003, all-day spring gobbler hunting was permitted during the last 2 weeks of the season. The regulation was amended in 2021 to extend all day hunting to the last three weeks of the hunting season. Based on survey responses from 2023 spring gobbler hunters, the majority of the hunting effort occurs in the morning the first two weeks of the season (53%), followed by mornings during the last three weeks (30%), and only approximately 12% of the hunting hours occur during the afternoons of the final three weeks of the season. In the 2023 survey, hunters were asked about the acceptability of expanding all day

turkey hunting to the full season. The survey respondents were very evenly split with 24% in favor of expanding the all-day segment and 23% opposed to expanding the all-day segment of the season. Forty-five percent of the survey participants also reported that they were extremely or somewhat unlikely to hunt in the afternoons if the opportunity was provided. Comparatively, 44% of respondents said they were somewhat or extremely likely to participate. During the 2024 spring turkey season, 92% of the harvested turkeys were reported as being harvested in the morning with only 7% being harvested in the afternoon. However, the afternoon harvests may account for as much as 25-30% of the weekly harvest total during the final three weeks of the season.

*Spring hunting satisfactions*.

As measured for fall hunting, an aggregate index of hunter satisfactions has monitored the quality of spring gobbler hunting experiences since 1995. Periodic hunter surveys have posed the question, "*overall, how do you rate the quality of your [current year] spring turkey season?*", with responses on a 7-point scale where 1= poor, 4=adequate, and 7= excellent. The most recent hunter survey (2022) indicated that hunters reported an adequate rating to the 2022 season. The 2014 Virginia Turkey Management Plan Turkey-related recreation goal called to improve spring hunter satisfaction. The 2011 hunter satisfaction rating of 3.95 was not statistically different than the 2022 rating, indicating the satisfaction had remained stable.

To determine factors that influence hunter satisfaction, turkey hunters were asked in a 2023 survey to indicate how important various factors were to their satisfaction. The highest-ranking factors were spending time outdoors, feeling safe while hunting, followed by spending time hunting with friends and family and hearing turkeys (tied). Calling or working turkeys, seeing turkeys or other wildlife were in the second tier of quality factors. Harvesting a turkey ranked much lower.

Hunters often suggest other alternatives for the timing of the spring gobbler season. When posed with the question about spring gobbler season timing, the majority of 2011 turkey hunters (70%) felt the season was timed just right; 24% felt it was too late, and 6% thought it was too early. In the 2023 survey, delaying the opening of the spring season was consistently the lowest scoring of options provided to improve turkey populations among survey participants. Participants were also more likely to suggest factors related to turkey reproduction should be factored into decision making over opportunities for hunters.

Recent regulation changes in neighboring states have resulted in calls to evaluate the bag limit of turkeys in Virginia. While excessive harvest of males has been shown to alter reproductive success, there is currently little evidence that populations in Virginia are being negatively affected by current harvest rates. Since there does not appear to be a population factor in this situation, hunter attitudes and preference may suggest the current bag limit of three birds is adequate. In the 2023 survey, 75% of survey respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the current bag limit while only 16% indicated support for lowering the bag limit. Of those desiring a reduced bag limit, the majority indicated the highest level of support for a two-bird annual limit.

Hunting Safety Concerns

Hunting safety is a concern associated with all hunting, but especially for turkey hunters, who typically wear camouflage and mimic the sounds of wild turkeys. Over the 57-year period from 1967-2023, a total of 204 spring turkey hunting incidents, including 24 fatalities, have been documented in Virginia. Almost all spring turkey hunting incidents in Virginia have involved a victim other than the shooter, with only 5% of the total being self-inflicted. With many overlapping hunting seasons during the fall, hunters often share hunting areas with hunters of other species and pursue multiple species at the same time. As a result, it is difficult to accurately determine hunting incidents specifically associated with turkey hunting during the fall.

The average annual rate of spring turkey hunting incidents has changed significantly since spring seasons were initiated in the 1960s (Fig. 32). As the popularity of spring turkey hunting increased between the 1960s and the 1980s, so did the annual rate of spring hunting incidents. The spring turkey hunting incident rate peaked during the mid-1990s with an average of 6.4 incidents every year. Since then, the incident rate has significantly decreased to an average of approximately 2 incidents per year. With stable hunter numbers since the mid-1990s (Fig. 30), the decrease in spring hunting incidents is undoubtedly related to the 1988 initiation of mandatory hunter education requirements for all new Virginia hunters and other prominent safety-awareness programs from the VDWR and sportsmen groups (e.g., NWTF).

When hunting incidents were at their peak, spring turkey hunters after the 1996 season ranked feeling safe as the second most important factor for a satisfying turkey season. More recent surveys such as the 2023 survey of turkey hunters indicates that feeling safe remains one of the highest ranked factors for a satisfying season. In the 2023 survey, feeling safe ranked the second most important factor, just behind being outdoors. Feeling safe while hunting clearly remains a core element of hunter satisfaction.

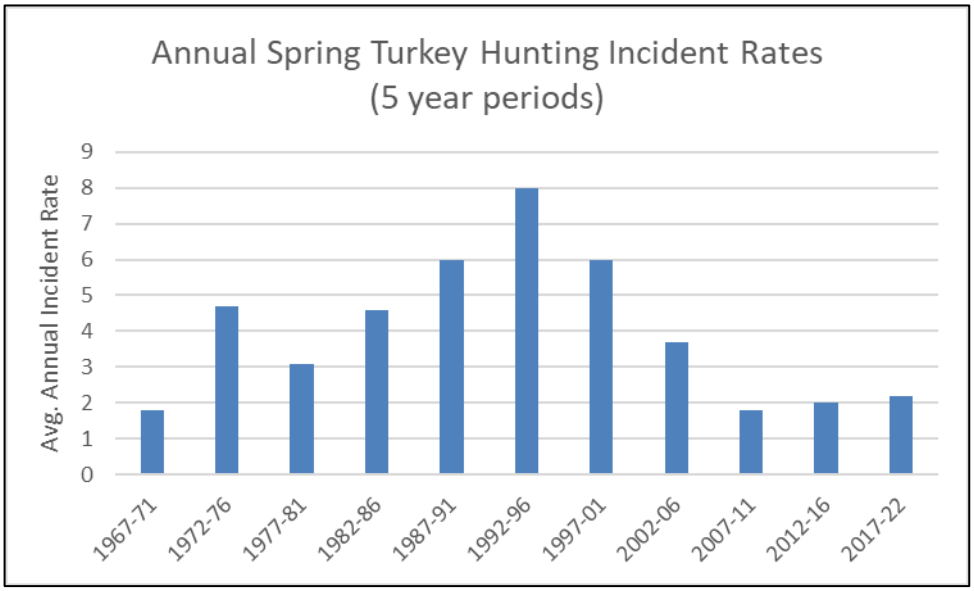


Figure 32. Trend in the rate of spring turkey hunting incidents in Virginia, 1968-2022.

*Rifle-related safety issues*.

Perceived as a safety issue by some hunters (especially for spring hunting), hunters often raise safety concerns about the use of rifles for turkey hunting. During the period from 2013 to 2023, 10% (n=2) of spring turkey hunting incidents involved rifles and only 7% (n=14) of the cumulative spring turkey hunting incidences since 1967 have involved a rifle. Presumably for safety considerations, many eastern Virginia counties have passed local ordinances that restrict the use of rifles for hunting (Fig. 33). Most of the county ordinances prohibit rifles for general hunting, although several including Caroline and Sussex specifically limit rifle use for turkey hunting. Restrictions in most counties impose limits such as "no rifles for big game", "no rifles for hunting", a maximum size of .22 caliber for rifles, or a maximum of .22 caliber rimfire. Several counties also allow the use of rifles larger than .22 caliber from an elevated stand.

In the 2023 survey of turkey hunters, 27% of fall turkey hunters reported hunting turkeys with rifles as opposed to only 7% of hunters using rifles in the spring season. Questions about the use of rifles were posed to turkey hunters after the 2011-12 hunting seasons. Most turkey hunters (57%) supported the use of rifles for turkey hunting during the fall, with 29% opposing rifle use and 15% having no opinion. However, opinions about rifle use for spring gobbler hunting were mixed, with identical support for prohibiting rifles (43%) and allowing rifles (43%); 14% of the hunters had no opinion.

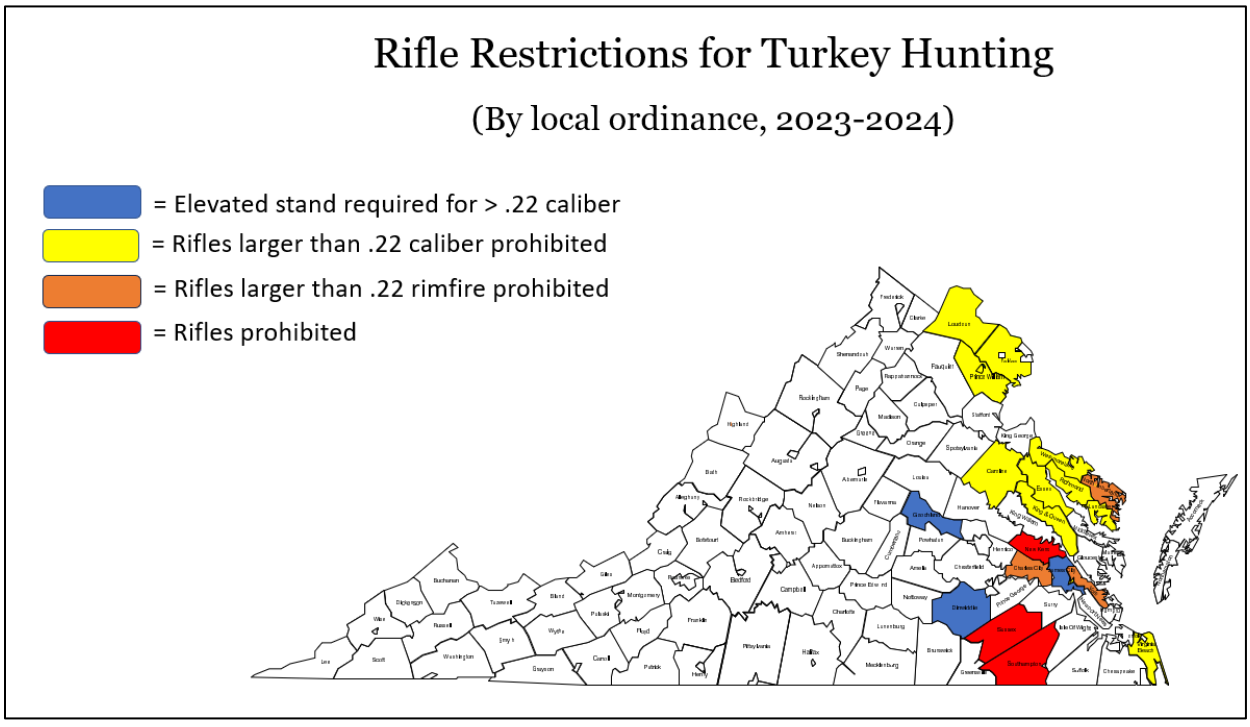


Figure 33. Counties with local firearms ordinances that restrict the use of rifles for turkey hunting during the 2023-2024 hunting seasons.

**Wild Turkey Damage Demands**

Agricultural Damage

During the first writing of the wild turkey management plan in Virginia (2012), growing populations and visibility of wild turkeys led to increased concerns about agricultural crop damage caused by turkeys. These concerns about turkey impacts on agriculture motivated crop depredation studies in many states including California, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin, as well as a national survey about turkey-related damage.

Turkey damage has been confirmed in many different agricultural crops including corn, wheat, grapes, soybeans, oats, tobacco, rye, ginseng, strawberries, tomatoes, apples, gardens, peanuts, ornamentals, barley, alfalfa, blueberries, and milo. Corn (silage, standing, and spring plantings) is the crop most often reported to be damaged by wild turkeys. Most confirmed reports and specific studies of turkey damage conclude that the losses are minimal for most producers. Because of their high visibility due to population numbers, body size, flocking behaviors, daytime activity, and habitat preferences, wild turkeys may often be disproportionately credited with crop damage. Specific studies of damage attributed to turkeys in crops (e.g., corn, soybeans, alfalfa, oats) have shown the primary cause to be from other wildlife, principally deer and raccoons. In only a few instances (especially in silage corn, grapes, ginseng, apples, and wheat) has crop damage by turkeys been considered to be moderate or heavy.

During the early 2000s (2002-2005), the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) led a large-scale study on grape depredation in vineyards across multiple states (California, New York, Connecticut, and Virginia). Using motion sensing cameras at these sites, NWTF was able to document 1,933 animals (representing 8 species) across the 15 vineyards. While turkeys were the most common species observed (43% of observations), they accounted for a consistently low percentage of damage (average 4%, range 2-6%). Raccoons (34%) and white-tailed deer (21%) made up the highest percentages of observed damage across all sites. Since this time, little additional research has occurred specifically to vineyard damage and wild turkeys. In Virginia, complaints from vineyard owners have been minimal. While damage to specialty crops (e.g., grapes) can be more financially significant than perceived damage to traditional agricultural crops, these specialty operations are often small enough to successfully utilize damage mitigation and prevention techniques successfully. In Virginia, fencing vineyards to prevent deer and bear damage may be helping with reducing damage by wild turkeys as well.

Data from the USDA-Wildlife Services (USDA-WS) Conflict Helpline in Virginia show that turkey agricultural damage complaints make up a very small percentage of their annual call volume. From fiscal years 2019 through 2023 there were a total of 277 calls regarding wild turkeys. Of those calls, agricultural damage complaints made up 3.4% of the turkey call volume. Damage most often cited in these reports was to landscaping, gardens, or turf/sod rather than traditional agricultural crops such as corn, soybeans, or vineyard grapes.

Other Turkey-human Conflicts

With the increased wild turkey and human populations and the turkey's adaptability to many environments, increased conflicts with people in urban/suburban areas are not surprising. Wild turkey- vehicle collisions become more of a concern with expanding turkey

populations and increased volume of traffic. Although road-killed turkeys and associated accidents are difficult to document, the number of incidences seems to be increasing.

Wild turkeys, and turkey-associated complaints, are now commonly observed in more suburban and exurban (i.e., semi-rural lands just beyond the suburbs) areas around cities and towns. Complaints include damage to landscape plantings, turkey droppings, aggressive birds around people, scratching motor vehicles, and roosting on roof tops. Adult male birds typically are the source of the aggressive interactions, which more frequently occur in spring during the breeding season.

USDA-WS conflict helpline data from FY19-FY23 shows a range from 9 calls for perceived nuisance situations (FY22) to a high of 22 nuisance/urban conflict calls (FY21), with an average of 14.8 nuisance/conflict calls per year. The majority of these conflict calls were in relation to vehicle damage or turkeys acting aggressively (e.g., following, chasing, physical contact with a person). In response to an increased number of urban wild turkey conflict calls since the 2012 plan, an internal guidance document (Turkey Conflict Mitigation) was developed by the DWR Turkey Technical Committee in 2019.

The occurrence of turkeys at airports can be a major issue for public safety. Per §29.1-529 of the Code of Virginia, being a hazard to aircraft is the only reason a "kill permit" can ever be issued for wild turkeys. From FY19-FY23, USDA-WS was contracted for turkey removals due to airplane hazards at Dulles International Airport, Naval Air Station Oceana, Naval Auxiliary Landing Field Fentress, and Richmond International Airport. In total, 134 turkeys were removed from all reported airfields during that time period, with the majority of removals occurring at Dulles. Additionally, USDA-WS has staff located on Reagan National, Felker Army Airfield, Langley Air Force Base, Naval Station Norfolk, and Wallops Flight Facility for turkey hazing and potential removal as needed due to aircraft hazards.

**Turkey Watching Demands**

Non-hunting wildlife recreation (e.g., wildlife viewing) has increased significantly over the last several decades. Although the extent of turkey-specific wildlife watching is unknown, viewing activities (e.g., observing, feeding, photographing) of all wildlife are important to Virginians. Over 35 % of Virginians reported watching wildlife in a 2016 survey, contributing to over 251 million days spent viewing wildlife. In 2021, DWR finalized the Virginia Wildlife Watching Plan to guide strategies for better incorporating wildlife watchers into the management of our resources. The Wildlife Viewing Plan incorporates 4 main goals:

- Connect diverse segments of the public to wildlife and wildlife viewing in Virginia
- Provide a variety of wildlife viewing opportunities accessible to all in the Commonwealth
- Promote wildlife and habitat conservation through wildlife viewing
- Connect broader constituencies to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources through wildlife viewing.

**Turkey Population Demands**

Wild turkey populations at the national and regional level are receiving considerable attention, and declines in populations are being noted in several surrounding states. The most significant declines appear to be in the southeastern states, with declines in productivity creating the largest concern for many states. While there are significant concerns on the national and regional scale in terms of turkey productivity, the populations in Virginia appear to be relatively stable (see population section) although there are areas of concern. Of note in Virginia is the lower-than-average productivity over the past 5-8 years as determined through annual brood surveys. This lower productivity is concerning, although harvests have remained high. The discrepancy between productivity estimates and harvest have created concerns from many hunters that we may be overharvesting populations.

The 2023-2024 Hunter Survey found that 45% of respondents felt turkey population in their area had declined or had declined dramatically, opposed to only 14% who felt the populations had increased or increased dramatically. The majority of respondents (55%) also indicated that they felt turkey populations in their area were too small, opposed to 37% who felt populations were just right, and only 3% who felt there were too many turkeys. A similar question was posed to turkey hunters in the 2023 Turkey Hunter Survey. Thirty-five percent of turkey hunters indicated that populations had declined or declined dramatically, while 23% indicated that populations had increased. While harvest data continues to show stable or increasing trends, it is clear that Virginia's turkey hunters are expressing concerning trends in turkey abundance.

In general, conflict concerns have been minimal indicating that cultural carrying capacity (CCC) has not been met at any broad scales to this point. While there are local and typically isolated issues with agricultural damage or urban situations, solutions for these isolated incidents are typically achievable with current population levels.

## Cultural Carrying Capacity

The joint impact of all the demands for wild turkeys (both negative and positive demands) results in the CCC. Sometimes called the wildlife stakeholder acceptance capacity, the cultural carrying capacity is the maximum number of turkeys in an area that is acceptable to the human population. The CCC is a function of the human tolerance of turkeys and the benefits derived from turkeys by all citizens. It is different for each constituency, location, and point in time. The actual CCC is subjective and involves a combination of social, economic, political, and biological perspectives. For example, a farmer experiencing crop damage from turkeys may have exceeded their tolerance and desire fewer turkeys. On the other hand, a wildlife enthusiast hoping to see lots of wild turkeys will likely want higher turkey populations. The CCC is ultimately a balancing act that involves trade-offs among the variety of public demands.

Somewhat unique to managing turkey populations for a CCC balance, will be harvest trade-offs between spring gobbler hunters and fall either-sex hunters. Based on modeling work at Virginia Tech (Fig. 34), spring gobbler harvests will be maximized at higher population sizes that approach the biological carrying capacity (BCC). However, because fall either-sex harvests are an additive form of mortality that control population levels, the highest turkey populations (and highest spring gobbler kills) will require minimal fall hunting opportunity and harvest. On the other hand, sustained fall harvests would be maximized at a

much lower population level (in theory, at 40% of BCC) where spring gobbler harvests would also be lower. While neither spring nor fall harvests would be at a maximum, the combined total harvest would be maximized at a population level of about 55% of BCC. Among other public considerations for desired turkey population size, these fall hunting and spring hunting trade-offs will need to be resolved.

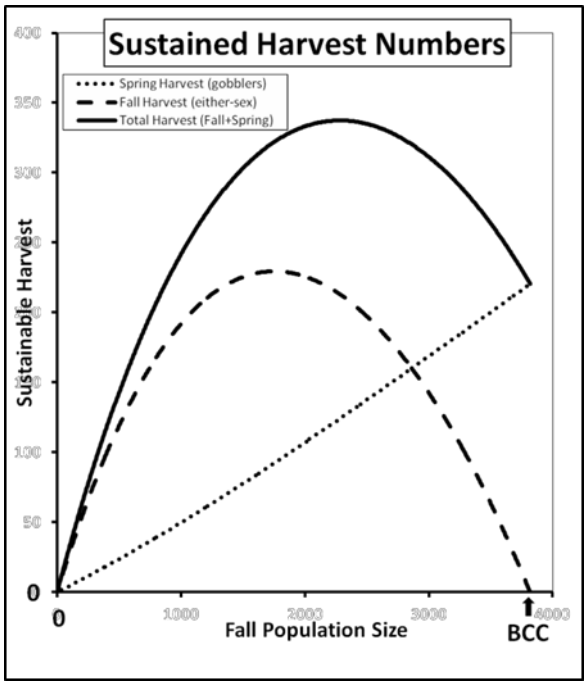


Figure 34. Sustained spring, fall, and total harvest relationships at different population levels. Adapted from McGhee et al. (2008).

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**Progress in meeting 2014 Turkey Management Plan Objectives**

| Objective: | Objective met: | Explanation: |
|---|---|---|
| **Goal : Turkey Populations** | | |
| To meet and maintain turkey population objectives at cultural carrying capacity in each county management unit through 12/31/2022. | Partial | Populations are meeting or exceeding objectives in 57 management units, failing to meet objectives in 40 management units. However, in 14 of the 40 failing management units, population trends are increasing but are not statistically significant. Most failures are in Management units with "Increase" objective (Appendix C). |
| To determine factors that may be limiting the attainment of turkey population objectives through 12/31/2022. | Partial | Low population and underperforming areas have been identified and potential issues have been evaluated. Emerging issues such as disease, habitat, and other factors have been evaluated. Specific research into limiting factors has not been conducted due to Agency wide research priorities and budgetary limitations. |
| To biennially assess and update turkey population CCC objectives in each county management unit through 12/31/2022. | Yes | Population objectives have been assessed through the biennial regulation setting process. CCC has not been modified or exceeded for any management unit to this point. |
| To annually assess and update turkey population status in each county management unit through 12/31/2022 | Yes | |
| To develop and/or continue site specific population management programs within county management units through 12/31/2022 | Partial | Developed BMP guidance document, Private land Biologists.<br>TPOP or supplemental harvest opportunities was not determined to be necessary following discussions with the internal Turkey Committee. |
| To validate and test sustained yield population models for turkeys and to determine practical methods for identifying maximum sustained yield for fall and spring harvests by 12/31/2020. | No | Other research needs took priority. |
| **Goal: Turkey Related Recreation** | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| To update knowledge of turkey hunter satisfactions and constraints to hunting participation in Virginia by 1/1/2016. | Partial | Biennial hunter surveys and 2023 turkey hunter survey (although outside of period). Spring Gobbler survey data. |
| To improve fall and spring turkey hunter satisfactions, as measured by the 2011 hunter survey, by 12/31/2022. | No<br>Stable trend | Turkey hunting quality was not addressed in the 2011 hunter survey. The 2009-10 survey indicated a mean quality of 3.4 for fall 2009 and 3.95 for Spring 2010. The 2021-22 hunter survey indicated a mean satisfaction of 3.5 for fall 2021 and 3.9 for spring 2022. Both fall and spring measures fall within the standard error for each respective survey so no conclusive change can be detected. |
| To determine non-hunting turkey recreation demands, desires, and satisfactions by 1/1/2017. | No | Low ranking objectives and not addressed due to low ranking although opportunities exist within DWR Viewing Plan to expand non hunting recreation. |
| Establish programs to meet demands and satisfactions for non-hunting recreational opportunities through 2022. | No | Low ranking objective and not addressed due to low ranking. Opportunities exist within DWR Viewing Plan. |
| **Goal: Hunting Tradition** | | |
| To have at least 55,000 fall hunters (i.e., a 30% growth from 2011) and 55,000 spring gobbler hunters (i.e., maintaining 2012 levels) annually participating in turkey hunting by 12/31/2022. | Partial | Based on the 2021-22 Hunter survey, spring hunter numbers are 67,000, fall hunter numbers have continued to drop and are below 28,000. |
| To determine limiting factors for participation in fall turkey hunting and make programmatic recommendations to preserve fall turkey hunting traditions and participation by 1/1/2018. | yes | Season adjustments in 2019 to move fall season out of muzzleloader, January season (2011), day before Thanksgiving added. Surveys indicate opportunities are not limiting factor, hunter choice seems to drive participation. |
| **Goal: Allocation of Fall harvest** | | |
| To manage turkey harvests during the peak deer hunting periods (during the first 2 weeks of early muzzleloading deer season and during the first 2 weeks of general firearms deer season) to be approximately 50% (between 40-60%) of the total annual | No | Current season allocation provides only 2 days within the peak of deer hunting season, as a result of season changes designed to increase interest/participation in traditional fall hunting. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| fall turkey harvest through the 2022-23 hunting seasons, while also providing quality turkey hunting opportunity prior to these peak deer hunting periods. | | |
| To refine appropriate allocation of fall turkey hunting opportunities and harvests by 1/1/2015. | No | See above |
| **Goal: Safety** | | |
| Compared to the 10-year period (2003-12) when 25 spring hunting incidents occurred, reduce turkey hunting-related incidents by 25% (by 6 incidents) for the period 2013- 2022. | No | During the period from 2013-2023 there were 21 spring hunting incidents reported. This represents a 16% reduction in the number of spring hunting incidents |
| To annually inform hunters and the general public about open turkey hunting seasons and associated safety considerations through 12/31/2022. | Yes | Hunter education produced a fanning/reaping video. Open hunting seasons were posted at kiosks and in the annual hunting digest. Hunter education updated class curriculum to include gobbler calls, blaze tree straps, fanning/reaping. |
| To develop and implement a system to annually monitor safety incidents related to fall turkey hunting by 12/31/2015. | Partial | Incident reporting forms provide the option to categorize incident types, although the officers may or may not include species hunted. |
| **Goal: Ethics and Compliance with Law** | | |
| To describe ethical principles for turkey hunting by 1/1/2016. | Yes | Regulatory discussions of issues including fanning, and daily bag limit were evaluated. The Hunter education curriculum for turkey hunting included ethics module. |
| To implement strategies that ensure compliance with these standards by 1/1/2018. | Yes | Law enforcement staffs were actively engaged in turkey enforcement and conducted trainings specific to turkey poaching. Technical committee evaluated regulations such as daily bag expansion and others that would have ethical considerations. Staff cooperated with partners (Jakes events), and the hunter education curriculum updated. |
| **Goal: Human-Wild Turkey Problems** | | |
| To quantify and assess agricultural and other negative turkey impacts by 1/1/2018. | Partial | Helpline data was evaluated for patterns and trends, however there were few calls or complaints, so efforts were redirected to species with higher damage potential. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| To develop and implement cost-effective response policies/guidelines for managing wild turkey problems by 1/1/2015. | Partial | Staff developed a BMP document to provide guidance to handling conflict situations, provided education and technical assistance to landowners, and shared to helpline, extension, etc. |

## MISSION, GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES

This section of the plan outlines and describes the goals for wild turkey management in Virginia through 2034. At the highest level, these turkey management goals align with the mission and goals of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), which are to:

- **Conserve** and manage wildlife populations and habitat for the benefit of present and future generations.
    - DWR Goal 1: Conserve sustainable and diverse native wildlife populations and ecosystems.
    - DWR Goal 2: Manage wildlife populations and habitats to meet the balanced needs among diverse human communities.

- **Connect** people to Virginia's outdoors through boating, education, fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, and other wildlife-related activities.
    - DWR Goal 3: Recruit, retain, and re-engage people who enjoy wildlife and boating activities.
    - DWR Goal 4: Promote people's awareness and appreciation of their role in wildlife conservation.

- **Protect** people and property by promoting safe outdoor experiences and managing human-wildlife conflicts.
    - DWR Goal 5: Minimize wildlife-related conflicts while balancing conservation goals and human benefits.
    - DWR Goal 6: Promote public safety for all people enjoying Virginia's wildlife and waterways.

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC, Appendix A) worked with DWR staff to revise goals from the 2013-2022 Wild Turkey Management Plan related to turkey populations, habitat, turkey-related recreation, and human-turkey conflicts. These goals reflect the values of a diverse public and are broad statements of principles and ideals about what should be accomplished with turkey management in Virginia. The goals articulate desired outcomes as well as important process guidance from the public on preferred approaches to achieve these stated outcomes. Simultaneously, overarching values and principles were identified as a mission for turkey management, which describes why and how turkeys should be managed in Virginia.

Based on these goals, the DWR Technical Committee (TC, Appendix B), in consultation with the SAC, developed specific objectives to help guide the successful attainment of each goal. Objectives are the technical expression of the public vision, expressed as goals. Some objectives used in this plan are intended to be quantifiable and/or have milestones for achievement; however, the entire set of objectives ultimately functions as a guide for achieving goals.

Potential strategies, which clarify how each objective should be met, were developed by TC and reviewed by SAC. While this is not an operational plan detailing all specific steps or actions to achieve objectives, these strategies represent some approaches, techniques, and programs that will be considered to accomplish objectives. As with objectives, decisions about what strategies to use are largely the technical realm of wildlife professionals, but still with input and considerations about what techniques are most acceptable to the public.

The broad mission and goal statements are much less likely to need amending before the next major plan revision than objectives and strategies. While goals should remain relatively constant over time, specific objectives and strategies will need flexibility to respond to changing social, environmental, technical, and administrative conditions. Objectives and/or strategies may be added, deleted, or amended by DWR as new information or circumstances demand. DWR staff will submit any interim updates to the SAC for review. Updated objectives will be provided as addenda to the Plan on the agency website.

**Turkey Plan Mission**

***Sustainably manage wild turkey populations as a wild, free-roaming public trust resource in a manner that serves the needs and interests of the citizens of the Commonwealth.***

***Manage wild turkey populations, turkey habitat, turkey-related recreation, and human-turkey conflicts, using biologically sound, applied science-based approaches that:***

- ***are ethical;***
- ***are flexible, innovative, and cost effective;***
- ***are proactive;***
- ***are publicly accepted (i.e., informed acceptance);***
- ***have impacts at relevant scales (local, region, state);***
- ***are accountable and transparent;***
- ***are collaborative with other agencies, partners, and the public; and,***
- ***are holistic, considering consequences on other species and stakeholders.***

These overarching values and principles establish, at the most basic level, why and how wild turkeys should be managed in Virginia. DWR has a legislative mandate (§29.1-103) to manage turkeys and other native wildlife in Virginia as a public trust for all citizens. Successful turkey management depends not only on the best scientific information and techniques, but also the support and engagement of a diverse public. Turkey management is the shared responsibility of DWR, other agencies, partners, and the public.

Seven (7) fundamental outcomes were identified within the four goals that follow (Appendix F). By the completion of this revision process, the SAC and the TC will have weighted these outcomes, which will help direct limited turkey program resources toward the most important areas of work.

**Goal 1: Population**

***Manage turkey populations at levels adaptable to changing landscapes that balance the varied needs and expectations of stakeholders statewide and locally. The use of regulated hunting and active habitat management should be the primary population management tools while acknowledging that other management tools may be employed depending upon localized objectives or limiting factors.***

This goal primarily addresses the tenet of the agency mission to "conserve and manage wildlife populations and habitat for the benefit of present and future generations." The need to balance the human needs associated with turkey populations is recognized in this goal and DWR Goal 2, as noted above; therefore, both the "connect" (e.g., recreation; DWR Goal 3) and

"protect" (e.g., human-wildlife conflicts; DWR Goal 5) tenets of the agency mission are implicated in this goal, as well.

Biological carrying capacity (BCC) is defined as the maximum number of turkeys that a habitat can sustain over time. The varied needs and expectations of the general public may differ from what our stakeholders want and need may be considered the cultural carrying capacity (CCC). CCC is the maximum number of turkeys in an area that is acceptable to the human population. Because different turkey population sizes have different implications for sustained yields, recreation, animal health, and conflicts, the desirable CCC population level for turkeys may not occur at the biological carrying capacity (BCC).

Unlike deer and bear, there are relatively few areas in Virginia where CCC is exceeded for turkeys (e.g., certain urban areas or specific properties). Therefore, the desired turkey population for most management units will either be at BCC or at the level that provides nearly maximum sustainable turkey harvest. In either case, strategies to minimize negative impacts on specific private properties within the larger management units will be necessary.

By manipulating factors that limit the attainment of desired turkey population levels, management to attain populations should be done on a local/regional basis. While lawful hunting and habitat management should be the primary population management tools, other factors such as illegal mortality, predation, or diseases may also require management. For the purposes of this plan, hunting refers to the legal pursuit and/or taking of wild animals under fair chase conditions for recreational and/or management purposes.

**Objective 1***: To meet and maintain turkey population objectives in each management unit (Figure 35)*

Turkey management to achieve desired population levels should be done over the smallest landscape area that is practical. In Virginia, counties and major cities (e.g., Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach) are the basic management units for monitoring wild turkey harvest and population trends. From a practical perspective, population objectives are generally set to increase, stabilize, or decrease the existing turkey population levels to meet the varied needs of stakeholders in changing landscapes.

As an aid for determining the size of the current turkey population in relation to the desired population level, the disparity between relative population density and the relative quality of suitable habitat in each county (Appendix C, Fig. 13) was considered. In general, all county management units with relatively low or very low turkey population densities were assumed to have underachieving population levels and had corresponding objectives to increase population abundance. County management units with moderate population densities in the highest quality habitats also had objectives to increase population levels. In addition, the objectives in counties with greater than 50% of their land area in National Forests is to increase populations due to the demand for turkeys in those areas.

Although the remaining counties had objectives to stabilize the turkey population, population increases would also be acceptable unless CCC was obviously being exceeded ("stabilize+" in Fig. 35). Although no management units were considered to have surpassed CCC, there were several management units in highly urbanized areas (e.g.,

Fairfax, Virginia Beach) where concerns for increased conflict suggested increasing the population may not be desirable. These management units have objectives of stabilize+ despite low or very low population densities. No county management unit was considered to have surpassed CCC, as such there were no objectives to decrease population levels at the county level.

Attainment of the population objectives likely will not be uniform across entire counties. Local site-specific needs for unique management concerns (e.g., damage issues near abundant vineyards, public lands popular for hunting or other recreation) might also result in locally different population objectives and management approaches compared to the rest of the county management unit. However, attainment of the county-wide objective will be based on population monitoring indices from across the entire county.

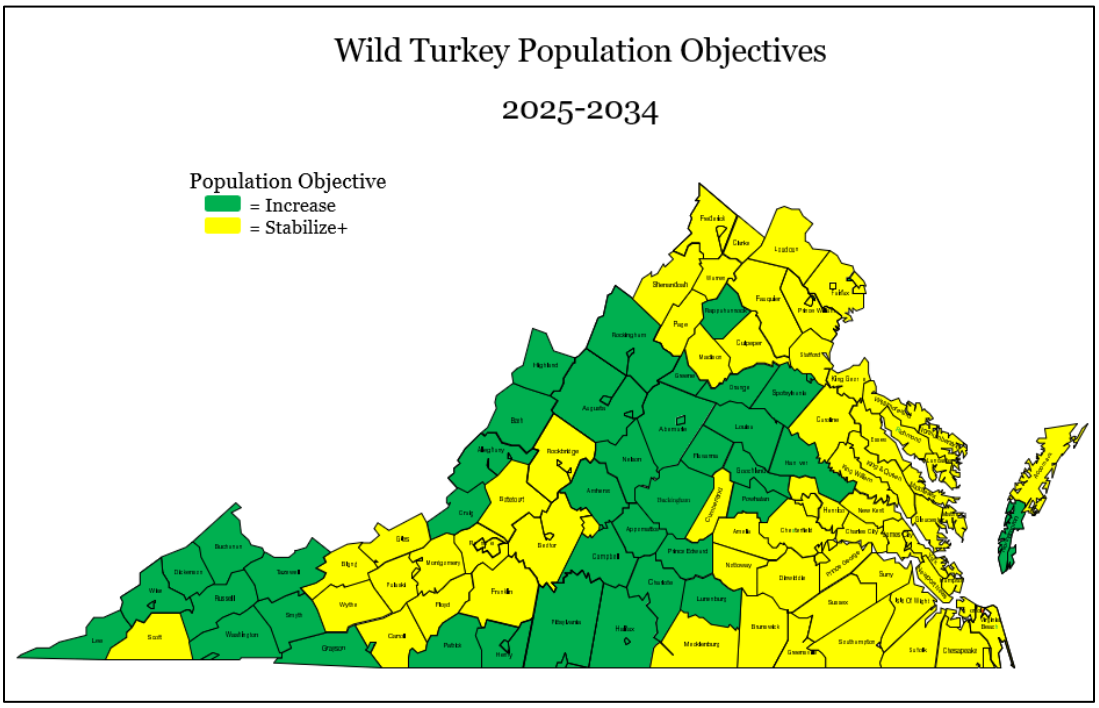


Figure 35. Wild turkey population objectives by county management unit, 2025-2034.

Potential Strategies:

- Control hunting mortality through bag limits, season structure (e.g., timing, length), hunting methods, and sex composition (of fall harvest).
- Manage illegal mortality through targeted enforcement, education, or other deterrent programs.
- Manage all National Forest and Department (DWR) owned and managed lands with an objective to increase turkey populations regardless of the county management objective.

**Objective 2.** ***Manage factors that may be limiting the attainment of turkey population objectives.***

Attaining population objectives depends on the proper identification of the factors that may be limiting current population management. Potential limiting factors for turkey management may be associated with human-related mortality (e.g., legal hunting, poaching), natural mortality factors, recruitment rates, habitat abundance and quality, and environmental influences. Describing, evaluating, and prioritizing these specific factors will be essential for designing management strategies. With the wide range of habitats, land use, and human values found across Virginia, these limiting factors for population management will also vary from area to area.

Potential Strategies:

- Identify limiting factors for the attainment of population objectives (e.g., disease, pesticides, predation, nesting disturbance, productivity and recruitment, habitat quality and quantity, legal and illegal hunting mortality, climate impacts) through focused research geared towards providing management recommendations
- Identify management units with unique population management issues (e.g., low populations, marginal habitats, higher hunting pressure or harvests) and provide potential recommendations to alleviate the limiting factors
- Evaluate habitat or land use impacts on turkey populations with an emphasis on regional differences
- Evaluate the effects of hunting mortality (resident and non-resident, bag limit, etc.) on turkey populations with particular emphasis on heavily hunted lands, areas of turkey population declines, and areas likely to be affected by excessive harvests.
- Monitor current and emerging issues within the state, region and national scope of turkey management and evaluate the implications for Virginia's populations
- Provide effective communication and education as appropriate on factors limiting turkey populations
- Provide technical assistance for management activities (e.g., active habitat management, reducing disease or predation risks) that mitigate or otherwise improve limiting factors for population growth at scales that are appropriate for the issue

**Objective 3.** ***To biennially assess, and update as necessary, turkey population objectives in each county management unit***

A challenge for implementing population objectives is balancing the dynamic changes that may occur over time in both turkey populations and social demands. As turkey populations, land use, human populations, and public values change, so will the public demands associated with wild turkeys. Because these factors may be constantly changing over time within any county management area, population objectives need to be periodically revisited to ensure that management programs respond accordingly.

Potential Strategies:

- Develop and evaluate methodology that incorporates habitat suitability (quantity and quality), public input methods (e.g., public surveys) and harvest metrics to establish management unit objectives
- Consider future changes in conditions (land use, habitat, human population density) that impact turkey populations and public perceptions of turkey populations
- Continue to investigate the use of maximum sustained yield (MSY) as an appropriate

basis for population objectives.

**Objective 4.** ***To annually assess and update turkey population status in each management unit***

In order to monitor progress toward meeting population objectives, an annual assessment of population status is necessary. Unfortunately, no economically practical methods exist to accurately estimate turkey population size across all county management units in Virginia. Currently, spring gobbler harvests in relation to available habitat and success by hunters are the best indices of turkey population trends and abundance. Data from additional surveys of bow hunters and spring gobbler hunters and other surveys, are also used to validate the population indications from harvest results. Annual monitoring of recruitment (e.g., via brood surveys) and other environmental variables such as weather and mast conditions also help explain the variations observed in population trend data.

Potential strategies:

- Monitor and evaluate harvest and hunting effort data (especially spring harvest) as an index of population status and conduct research to validate the use of harvest as a metric of population trends
- Evaluate and monitor the availability of the landscape available to hunting specifically as it pertains to the harvest index
- Evaluate effectiveness of other population data to provide multiple indices of population parameters (e.g., brood surveys, recruitment, mortality, gobbler call counts) and monitor indices that accurately reflect population impacts or changes
- Monitor environmental parameters that impact populations and interpretation of population monitoring indices (e.g., mast conditions, weather, predators)
- Evaluate effectiveness of management-based indices of relative population size and habitat quality (i.e., Habitat Suitability Index).
- Evaluate climate vulnerability for turkey populations (e.g., nesting and gobbling chronology, disease impacts)

**Objective 5.** ***To develop and/or continue site-specific population management programs within management units.***

Even when a county-wide population objective is met, attainment will likely not be met uniformly in all areas of the county management unit. Site-specific management needs for unique concerns (e.g., damage issues around vineyards) might also result in locally different population objectives and management programs. County-wide hunting seasons are purposefully designed at a relatively large scale to be as simple and uniform as possible among counties. Because habitats, turkey densities, hunting pressure, turkey issues, and public demands vary within counties, broader population management approaches may sometimes be too conservative or too liberal at specific sites within county management units. Unique management needs in local areas may require alternative site-specific management approaches. Site-specific management might be needed in urban areas, wildlife refuges, parks and other public lands, planned communities, airports, or agricultural areas.

Potential strategies:

- Provide technical assistance to communities, landowners, and agricultural producers to mitigate potential population issues that arise.
- Develop non-lethal management actions that can be employed in special circumstances where hunting may not be a feasible alternative
- Provide localized opportunities for supplemental harvest or removal of turkeys when there is a need to control conflicts or human interactions (i.e. kill permits, targeted property-level hunting programs, etc.)
- Evaluate alternatives to hunting in scenarios where hunting may not be a feasible alternative for lethal removal.

**Objective 6.** ***To investigate and evaluate alternative population monitoring methodologies (approaches) for turkeys***

Given limitations with current methods of turkey population assessment (e.g., relationships between hunter effort, harvest selectivity, available habitat, and turkey population size), turkey managers and researchers must continue to improve monitoring methods that are more sensitive to changes in wild turkey populations.

Potential Strategies:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of non-harvest related metrics (e.g., eBird, iNaturalist, breeding bird survey) to track population changes over time.
- Improve monitoring methodologies or technologies that can better detect changes in population (e.g., automated recording unit surveys)

## Goal 2: Habitat

***Manage turkey habitat compatible with turkey population, recreation, and conflict goals while working across diverse public and private lands and ecosystems. Habitat conservation actions should benefit multiple species with an emphasis on areas of special significance to the life history of turkeys (e.g., nesting or brood rearing habitat) while also considering potential impacts of other landscape changes (e.g., land use or climate impacts).***

This goal primarily addresses the "conserve" tenet in the agency mission statement. The availability of suitable turkey habitat is key to managing turkeys to meet specific population and recreational goals while also minimizing human-turkey conflicts. Habitat management activities that affect habitat diversity, forest succession, land use, and habitat connectivity will have significant implications for meeting turkey population objectives. Habitat management practices that promote a diversity of habitat types, with particular emphasis on habitats needed for nesting and brood rearing, will likely benefit turkey populations. When feasible, the use of native plant communities or natural regeneration will be preferred over intensive planting of non-native species. The lack of active habitat management, particularly across large public landscapes, and the ensuing lack of habitat diversity and productivity will continue to be a detriment to turkey populations. Education and outreach on the benefits of active forest management, particularly on lands consisting of even-aged climax forest (composed of species such as American beech, tulip poplar, sugar maple) are necessary to achieve habitat and thus population goals for turkeys.

Increasing urbanization and human population growth across portions of Virginia will have direct impacts to turkey habitat and thus turkey population and recreational goals. The human population in Virginia grew by nearly 7.4% from the 2010 to 2020 census, an addition of more than 600,000 people. While much of this growth is centered along the Interstate 95 corridor (from Loudoun County south to Virginia Beach), pockets of growth also occur along the Interstate 81 corridor, particularly the Roanoke/Montgomery County area and from Rockingham County east to Charlottesville (US Census, 2020). Portions of these areas have had turkey population concerns since the past turkey management plan. Increasing human development and the loss of turkey habitat along with a continued lack of active habitat management will only continue to exacerbate turkey population issues in these areas. Habitat fragmentation will likely become an increasingly important issue for turkey habitat management through the duration of this turkey plan.

**Objective 1.** ***To update and evaluate the turkey habitat status in each management unit every five years***

As Virginia's landscape continues to evolve it will be critical to evaluate land use patterns and changes in relation to turkey habitat suitability throughout the lifespan of the plan. Factors such as urbanization, particularly around northern Virginia and Interstate 95 corridor along with land use changes (development, solar farms, data centers, forest succession) will impact habitat suitability for wild turkeys possibly leading to localized population impacts or changes in cultural carrying capacity (urban conflict situations). The habitat suitability model is used in conjunction with current population densities (e.g., using spring gobbler harvest indices) to set turkey population objectives. Thus, changes to habitat suitability can have a potential positive or negative impacts on population objectives and the ability to meet those objectives.

Potential Strategies:

- Incorporate the most recent landscape inventory and forest inventory data to enhance and update the habitat suitability index model.

**Objective 2.** ***To identify management units where habitat is a limiting factor for achieving turkey population and recreation goals***

As depicted in Figure (12), habitat suitability varies across Virginia, with areas of "good" habitat depicted by the red or orange coloration while areas of less suitable habitat are depicted as blue to purple. These differences can be seen regionally and locally within a management unit. Regionally, the area west of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia are predominantly categorized by mature hardwood forests in a late successional (climax) stage. Interspersion of successional stages is limited in these areas where the predominant land ownership is public land (USFS, VDWR). Evaluating county level land ownership, forest successional stages, current and potential habitat management practices, and the feasibility of habitat manipulations will all be critical for understanding habitat variables limiting turkey population and recreational goals.

Potential Strategies:

- Identify differences in populations and habitat in public and private landownership

- Determine impacts of habitat changes (e.g., land use patterns, aging forests, changes in agricultural production) on turkey populations

**Objective 3**. ***Promote appropriate turkey habitat management especially in management units where habitat is a limiting factor for achieving turkey population, recreation, and conflict goals.***

Activities that intentionally (forest management) or unintentionally (development) alter turkey habitat will have implications on meeting turkey population, recreation, and conflict goals. Virginia is comprised of primarily private land (90% of land area), thus habitat manipulation by private landowners can have profound impacts on turkeys as well as other wildlife species. Working with conservation organizations such as NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts will be highly beneficial in promoting and encouraging private land habitat management. In western Virginia public land ownership is more prominent, thus making partnerships and education about the importance of public land management a critical piece for improving areas with limited turkey habitat suitability currently. Working with partners (federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations such as the National Wild Turkey Federation and The Nature Conservancy) will be necessary to achieve landscape scale habitat changes, particularly over the long term.

Potential Strategies:

- Promote partnerships with state and federal partners, NGOs and private landowners to cooperatively manage habitat at landscape scales and to educate and provide technical assistance to landowners in efforts to achieve population objectives
- Support efforts to enhance active management of landscapes on public lands with an emphasis on DWR lands to serve as an example for habitat management.
- Educate land managers (i.e., DWR staff, other public land managers, partners, and private landowners) about specific turkey habitat needs (e.g., nesting, brood, escape), vegetative communities (e.g., early successional plant communities) that facilitate those needs, and management techniques to develop the appropriate habitats to meet population and recreation objectives and associated values for other wildlife
- Identify and discourage land management practices that may inhibit the attainment of population objectives (e.g., mowing or other disturbance during nesting or brood rearing).
- Promote habitat practices that provide long-term benefits to a diversity of wildlife species emphasizing natural plant communities rather than more artificial management.

**Objective 4.** ***Increase stakeholder awareness, support, and tolerance for turkey habitat management including the need for management and method used***

Education is a critical component of habitat management. Providing scientific information on habitat and practices to the public will continue to be a challenge and opportunity. Misinformation about habitat management practices tends to spread quickly and garner intolerance for many types of habitat manipulations. Proactive messaging should be emphasized across multiple user groups of the outdoors (e.g., hunters,

recreationists, ecologically-minded citizens) as to the benefits of managed disturbances (e.g., timber harvests, prescribed burning, invasive species removals) to both turkeys and other wildlife species should be emphasized whenever possible. Partnerships for to provide habitat education through various methods will continue to be important and will likely be strengthened as changes to Virginia's landscape continue.

Potential Strategies:

- Promote the value of active habitat management (including forest management) on public and private lands to achieve population objectives
- Education to promote wild turkey habitat management through publications, social media, workshops and other media.
- Collaborate with other agencies, schools, NGOs and other entities to educate on the importance of habitat management activities
- Educate the public about the relationship between habitat quality and turkey densities
- Enhance the public appreciation of habitats (e.g., diverse forests, early successional communities) that benefit turkeys and other wildlife.
- Increase awareness of recreational user impacts on habitat and disturbance

**Goal 3: Recreation**

***Provide and promote various forms of wild turkey-related recreation to optimize quality opportunities (i.e., safe, responsible, ethical, lawful, and accessible). Preserve the heritage and tradition of hunting turkeys (fall and spring), and provide opportunities to observe turkeys, for both management and recreational benefits. Turkey related recreational opportunities should not prevent the attainment of population objectives.***

This goal primarily addresses the "connect" tenet of the agency mission (DWR Goals 3 and 4), but also implicated in this goal are the "conserve" (e.g., manage populations; DWR Goal 2) and "protect" (e.g., promote safe outdoor experiences; DWR Goal 6) tenets of the agency mission.

Wild turkeys provide valuable recreational opportunities for a diverse suite of users across the Commonwealth including hikers, hunters, wildlife watchers, photographers, and the general public. Regulated hunting through the allocation of season lengths, season timing, and hunting methods (fall or spring), is the preferred management tool for meeting population objectives. Regulated hunting can provide recreational benefits while also attaining population objectives of increase or stabilize depending on the parameters placed on the hunting seasons (i.e. timing, overlap with deer seasons, season structure) and/or methods. The array of turkey hunting opportunities in Virginia through spring and fall seasons (including archery, firearms, and traditional turkey-dog hunting), provide distinct experiences and satisfactions for the recreational users. Virginia's hunters consistently rate turkey hunting importance as very high, second only to deer hunting.

Based on a 2016 survey, approximately 35% of Virginia's population viewed wildlife, equating to nearly 2.1 million wildlife viewers in the state and equating to nearly $32 billion dollars in wildlife viewing expenditures. Wild turkeys continue to rank highly as a species valued for viewing opportunities in Virginia. While the number of licensed hunters in Virginia

has declined over the past thirty years, wildlife viewing has seen a slight increase in participation. In 2021, DWR completed its first Virginia Wildlife Viewing Plan outlining four key goal areas to continue to engage and support wildlife viewing across the Commonwealth. Non-hunting recreational opportunities to enjoy wild turkey in their natural habitat should be available to all Virginia citizens.

**Objective 1.** ***Monitor turkey hunter satisfactions and constraints to hunting participation in Virginia to maintain fall and spring turkey hunter satisfactions at the adequate level, as measured by the biennial hunter survey.***

Individuals hunt for many reasons, which provide a distinct set of satisfactions (e.g., for meat, to be with friends or family, observing wildlife, being close to nature, working with dogs, testing their skills, for the challenge), but specific information on turkey hunter satisfactions needs to be continually monitored and updated. Understanding hunter satisfactions and intrinsic motivations for turkey hunting will allow recreational opportunities to be tailored to better meet these satisfactions. Understanding constraints to participation in turkey hunting (e.g., free time, cost, access) will also be beneficial in evaluating hunter effort and developing recreational programs that maximize hunter satisfactions while minimizing constraints and still meeting programmatic goals.

Average satisfaction ratings for fall and spring hunting have remained relatively stable over the previous plan period. The most recent hunter survey (2022-2023 season) indicated that spring turkey hunter satisfactions had dropped just below the adequate level at a rating of 3.8 (on a 7-point scale) although ratings have remained fairly stable over the past decade, with a slight dip since 2022. Fall hunting satisfactions have also remained stable at 3.4 (on a 7-point scale), although below the desired (adequate) level. Identifying and managing for factors that enhance satisfactions can improve the overall hunting experience, leading to an enhanced value of turkey hunting recreation.

Potential Strategies:

- Conduct hunter surveys at regular intervals to gauge effort and satisfaction of both resident and non-resident hunters
- Determine the relative importance of desirable attributes for quality spring and fall turkey hunting experiences (e.g., bag limits, seasons, access, disturbance, harvest)
- Determine constraints to turkey hunter participation and enjoyment (e.g., access, interference, overlap with deer seasons)
- Focus efforts to increase hunter satisfaction in areas where it is currently inadequate (e.g., Northern Mountains)
- Develop or improve methodology to regularly monitor turkey hunter trends in participation, effort, and success for both resident and non-resident hunters.

**Objective 2.** ***To determine non-hunting turkey recreation demands, desires, and satisfactions, and inform the public about non-hunting recreational opportunities.***

Non-hunting recreational demands for turkey are poorly understood. While the

demand to view wild turkeys is high among some members of the public, satisfactory approaches to developing these viewing opportunities are unknown. Improved understanding of non-hunting recreational desires for wild turkeys and how these opportunities can be used to tailor education and outreach programs while preventing unnatural situations is needed.

Potential Strategies:

- Survey Virginia citizens regarding non-hunting recreational satisfactions and demands (e.g., wildlife viewing, photography)
- Evaluate the constraints to participating in non-hunting recreation
- Prioritize programs based on demands expressed by Virginia citizens in the DWR Wildlife Viewing Plan
- Ensure that turkey viewing opportunities do not facilitate human-turkey conflicts and promotes more natural activities (e.g., discourages supplemental feeding).
- Develop best management practices for wildlife viewing and hunting on public lands
- Continue educational programs on turkey biology and management geared towards non-hunting recreationists
- Facilitate and promote viewing opportunities in accessible locations

**Objective 3.** ***Maintain turkey hunting quality by preserving diverse types of hunting opportunities (fall and spring)***

Hunting quality is driven by multiple factors, including the type of opportunity or experience the individual hunter is looking to achieve. Traditionally, Virginia turkey hunters have enjoyed diverse hunting opportunities (e.g., spring, fall, opportunistic, archery), perhaps a greater diversity of opportunity than most other states. While some hunters participate in multiple seasons or styles of hunting (multi-season hunters) other are more selective, preferring a specific season, weapon, or type of experience (spring or fall only, passive-opportunistic, or turkey-dog hunting). Maintaining diverse opportunities and exploring options to maximize or create new opportunities may improve or increase participation and subsequently improve the value of turkey hunting satisfaction for a greater number of hunters. However, these diverse opportunities also create potential conflicts of how the opportunities or harvests are allocated among user groups.

Allocation of hunting opportunities and harvest is an ongoing issue that impacts multiple constituent groups. There are diverse (and sometimes conflicting) interests, values, and satisfactions associated with different hunting methods or seasons. Continual evaluation of current harvest season structures with diverse public input is necessary to optimize hunter satisfactions while limiting conflict between hunters of varying methods. A diverse mix of recreational hunting opportunities that provide an equitable allocation among user groups and participants based on their unique harvest rates, efficiency, and methodology will continually be adapted based on hunter desires and meeting population objectives

Potential Strategies:

- Identify recreational demands for all types of turkey hunting through hunter surveys and other sources
- Manage the allocation of recreational opportunities among users (e.g., weapon, method, season timing, land type, residency) in a manner that limits user conflicts to the extent feasible
- Develop and enhance recruitment, retention and reactivation programs for all types of hunters (e.g., youth, women, weapons, season, timing, dogs)
- Evaluate various approaches to increase participation (quota hunts, etc.) and promote access to lands not traditionally open to public hunting
- Evaluate appropriate access plans specifically on publicly owned land to improve recreational satisfaction, hunter safety, and provide maximum user benefit while ensuring population objectives are being met.

**Objective 4.** ***Provide for appropriate turkey hunting allocation between traditional fall turkey hunters and opportunistic fall hunters***

Fall hunting seasons provide a diversity of recreational hunting opportunities and experiences. However, the traditional either-sex harvest of the current fall season structure has been identified as a potential factor limiting population growth. Over harvesting hens in the fall season can be a significant management concern. Providing maximum opportunity during fall seasons may come with trade-offs in population growth. On the other hand, maximizing population growth may necessitate decreased opportunity.

During periods of overlap with deer hunting seasons, opportunistic take may be maximized; however, these harvests may push the limits of population objectives and may require shortened seasons to achieve or maintain objectives. Finding and maintaining an appropriate balance of these trade-offs within fall hunting user groups, while meeting population objectives, can lead to decreased tension between user groups and subsequently increased recreational value. Developing and implementing a decision matrix that incorporates a suite of data from diverse user groups, population data, and other metrics will allow improved allocations in season structure and harvest.

Potential Strategies:

- Utilize hunter survey data, stakeholder meetings, and regulatory processes to determine the ideal allocation of harvest
- Manage hunting season opportunities (i.e. season timing and length, bag limits, hen harvest, weapon, overlap with other hunting opportunities) to balance allocation and population objectives
- Develop a transparent and defensible matrix for setting fall harvest seasons that incorporate population index, population objectives, hunter preferences and other factors to determine ideal season structure

**Objective 5.** ***Annually monitor and minimize turkey hunting incidents in both the spring and fall hunting seasons***

Hunter safety is a concern for all hunting and is often cited as a significant concern for turkey hunters. The incident rates for turkey hunters have decreased over the previous decades and through the life of the preceding plan (Figure 32). Building upon those successes is vital to ensure that recreational user safety remains at the forefront of management decisions. Not only will a safe hunting experience increase the recreational value to hunters, but also a safe image of hunting will also alleviate many safety concerns of other outdoor or recreational users during open turkey hunting seasons.

Potential Strategies:

- Promote mandatory hunter education to emphasize the importance of safety
- Evaluate effectiveness of online or in-person hunting education programs (workshops, traditional hunter-ed courses)
- Cooperate with other agencies and organizations to deliver consistent hunter safety information
- Evaluate emerging hunting techniques that may affect hunting safety (e.g., fanning or reaping, shotshell technology)
- Implement laws and hunting regulations that reduce hunting incidents and fatalities
- Annually inform hunters and the general public about open hunting seasons and associated safety considerations
- Promote the safety record of turkey hunting

**Objective 6.** ***Promote turkey hunting methods that are sportsmanlike and ethical***

The future of turkey hunting may be affected significantly by public perception of turkey hunters and turkey hunting activities. Therefore, guidelines, regulations, and education pertaining to turkey hunting should address sportsmanlike and ethical behaviors and methods.

Potential Strategies:

- Based on surveys or other methods, describe and define turkey hunting activities that are not considered sportsmanlike or ethical.
- Develop and implement educational programs, regulations, guidelines, and recognition programs in conjunction with partner agencies and organizations to encourage hunter ethics.
- Manage illegal activities to promote sportsmanlike and ethical behavior through law enforcement, incentives, and other deterrence strategies.
- Enact regulations to address hunting activities that are not considered fair, sportsmanlike, and ethical.
- Maintain prohibition on the use of bait to hunt turkey.
- Encourage the responsible utilization of harvested turkeys (meat, feathers, etc.)

- Maintain the image of turkey hunters as important and influential conservationists

**Goal 4: Conflict**

***Prevent and reduce human-wild turkey conflicts (e.g., agricultural, residential, recreational, airport) while:***

- ***promoting shared responsibility (personal, community, agency)***
- ***fostering practices that keep turkeys wild***
- ***prioritizing use of nonlethal methods to resolve conflicts,***
- ***using regulated hunting as the preferred method when lethal alternatives are required to manage conflicts,***
- ***attaining turkey population, habitat, and recreation goals.***

This goal primarily addresses the tenet in the agency mission to "protect people and property by promoting safe outdoor experiences and managing human-wildlife conflicts (DWR Goal 5 and 6). The "conserve" (e.g., manage populations and coexistence; DWR Goal 2) and "connect" (e.g., appreciation for the species; DWR Goal 4) tenets of the agency mission are also implicated in this goal area.

Turkey management goals are not limited to achieving population objectives or providing recreation for Virginia's citizens. Although generally much less of a concern than other wildlife species (e.g., bear, deer), wild turkeys may still create problems for agricultural crops, people in residential areas, vehicle collisions, and airport safety risks. With rural and urban environments in close proximity to turkeys and turkey habitats, wild turkey conflicts can occur almost anywhere in Virginia.

Citizens, communities, local governments, VDWR, and other state and federal agencies share responsibility in managing human-turkey conflicts. While VDWR has primary responsibility for managing turkey populations, the decisions and actions of landowners, local governments, and all citizens directly influence the type of interactions people have with turkeys and the effectiveness of programs to prevent or mitigate human-turkey conflicts. Community leaders can minimize potential negative human-turkey interactions by proactively making policy decisions such as enacting wildlife feeding ordinances, which limit habituation and food conditioning.

Education and outreach are critical components of the human-turkey conflict goal area. Effective public information campaigns and consistent messaging across all jurisdictions and by all stakeholders are necessary to both foster coexistence with wild turkeys and provide factual conflict prevention strategies. Collaborative efforts between VDWR and impacted stakeholders (e.g., agricultural producers, residential neighborhoods, airports) are also vital to further the science in conflict prevention and mitigation strategies.

**Objective 1.** ***Monitor and assess agricultural, residential, recreational, and airport wild turkey conflicts***

Knowledge of turkey related conflicts, particularly agricultural and residential, are

currently limited in scope and severity. Reliable estimates of turkey damage to agricultural crops in Virginia is currently non-existent, with limited reports involving sod/turf farms, commercial row crops (e.g., soybeans, peanuts), and vineyards. As human populations continue to increase, urban turkey conflict situations may also become more apparent on the landscape. Reports of aggressive turkeys around homes, parks, or businesses do occur, but the overall extent of these situations is often not fully known.

Potential Strategies:

- Utilize the wildlife conflict helpline to gather data on damage complaints
- Evaluate metrics related to agricultural damage caused by turkeys (vineyard damage, potential domestic poultry impacts, etc.).
- Evaluate metrics related to residential or urban conflicts (e.g., damage, harassment).

**Objective 2.** ***To implement and review best management practices (for the public and agency) that utilize both non-lethal and lethal options for managing turkey conflicts***

Standardized, but flexible, wildlife conflict response guidelines are necessary to clarify public and agency responsibilities for human-turkey conflicts. Options for managing conflict situations are often poorly understood by the public, thus education will be a key component of guidance documents. In addition to support from VDWR, citizens, communities, local governments, and other agencies share the responsibility for managing conflicts associated with turkeys. Non-lethal conflict mitigation strategies are primarily favored by the general public and are encouraged as a first step before using lethal control. VDWR currently has a turkey best management practices guidance document for dealing with turkey conflicts (Appendix D). Ongoing training and review are critical elements of response guidelines.

Potential Strategies:

- Maintain and revise (when necessary) cost-effective response policies/guidelines to address human-turkey conflicts.
- Allow flexibility in policies/guidelines to allow affected individuals, landowners, and municipalities a range of choices in resolving conflict situations.
- Communicate and educate the public, municipalities, and state agencies about these policies/guidelines.
- Policies/guidelines and regulations should identify and correct citizen actions that encourage turkey conflicts (e.g., intentional feeding that habituates turkeys to people).

**Objective 3.** ***To develop policies and protocols for alternative approaches to managing site specific turkey conflicts when hunting is ineffective, unacceptable, or not feasible***

When lethal removal is warranted due to human-turkey conflicts, regulated hunting will be the preferred option. To provide consistency and simplicity, turkey hunting regulations are uniformly established on a county level. While this is generally sufficient to meet population objectives, it may be ineffective to address localized issues or unique situations, such as highly urbanized areas or extensive agricultural damage associated with large refuges or un-hunted landscapes. Thus, site specific management options that utilize non-lethal and lethal tools outside of regulated hunting are critical.

Education and outreach will be necessary to ensure success of unique management approaches and to mitigate public concerns.

Potential Strategies:

- Evaluate the feasibility and desirability of special options that might be utilized for site-specific concerns (e.g., nuisance wildlife control operators, hazing, etc.).

**Objective 4.** ***Maintain and expand prohibitions on feeding wildlife especially as they pertain to disease and human habituation***

The negative effects of feeding wildlife and thus congregating animals at a single location include disease transmission risks, negative effects on native habitats from unnaturally high densities of animals, habituation and/or food conditioning of fed animals, and increased human-wildlife conflicts. While feed may be placed out for one species, it is often hard to prevent any number of other wildlife species from accessing this open food source, often leading to intermingling of species that is not seen in more natural settings. This can increase the risk of disease transmission both within the same species as well as across various species. In areas where wildlife diseases are prevalent or disease management units are designated (e.g., chronic wasting disease management areas for deer, sarcoptic mange endemic counties for bear), the feeding of all wildlife should be prohibited or at a minimum strongly discouraged year-round.

Potential Strategies:

- Develop and maintain regulations that prohibit feeding all wildlife, with particular emphasis in areas where wildlife diseases have been identified or are at increased risk.

**Objective 5.** ***Increase stakeholder support for turkey conflict management methods and tolerance for turkey related conflicts.***

Successful turkey management depends not only on the best scientific information and techniques, but also the support and engagement of a diverse citizenry. Public attitudes and perceptions can greatly influence the success or failure of turkey conflict management options. Preventing and reducing human-turkey conflicts is a shared responsibility of the public and VDWR. Education and outreach are the primary tools for reducing negative human turkey interactions by increasing the understanding of turkey behavior, increasing tolerance for turkeys, and providing techniques and resources for prevention and mitigation of conflict situations. Continuing to provide regulated recreational hunting opportunities to meet population objectives is also an important tool in reducing negative human-turkey conflicts over time.

Potential Strategies:

- Advocate public outreach and education messages to change attitudes and behaviors in support of turkey conflict management.
- Collaborate with other agencies, non-governmental organizations, schools, private entities and individuals, etc. (e.g., agribusiness, insurance companies, VA Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services)

- Target audiences to increase public awareness about turkey conflict issues and solutions.
- Develop educational materials for agricultural producers and the public regarding turkey damage abatement programs and techniques.
- Educate public about human and animal health relating to turkey in coordination with Virginia Department of Health and other appropriate agencies.

Appendix A. Stakeholder Advisory Committee

| Name | Interest/Organization | DWR Region |
|---|---|---|
| David Eustis | Fall turkey hunter | Region 4 |
| Bridges Comer | Fall turkey dog hunter | Region 2 |
| Earl Seachrist | Multi season hunter | Region 4 |
| Austin Bradley | Spring turkey hunter - Public | Region 3 |
| Jon Joyner | NWTF | Region 1 |
| Jason Lupardus* | Turkeys for Tomorrow | Kentucky |
| Isaac Weintz | Back Country Hunters and Anglers | Region 4 |
| Morgan Wilson | General Conservation (Hollins University) | Region 2 |
| Adrienne Frank | Master Naturalist | Region 1 |
| Nolan Nicely | Appalachian Habitat Association | Region 4 |
| John Taylor | SW Virginia Sportsmen | Region 3 |
| Chad Forehand | USDA-WS, Urban | Region 1 |
| Tom Olexa | Dept of Navy | Region 1 |
| David Demarest | National Park Service | Region 4 |
| Danny Wright | US Forest Service | Region 4 |
| Randy Kyner | VA Dept of Forestry | Region 2 |
| Jake Tabor | Virginia Farm Bureau | Region 1 |
| David Cearley | Virginia Vineyards Association | Region 4 |
| Nathan Osborne | Private Landowner | Region 3 |
| Powhatan Owen** | Chickahominy Tribal Member | Region 1 |

* Local Chapter representative unavailable

**Unable to attend meetings

Appendix B. Virginia Department of Wildlife Turkey Technical Committee

| Name | Agency Position | Region |
|---|---|---|
| Kat Black | District Biologist | Region 3 |
| Ali Davis | District Biologist | Region 2 |
| Mike Dye | Forest Gamebird Biologist | Statewide |
| Todd Englemeyer | District Biologist | Region 1 |
| Joe Ferdinandsen | District Biologist | Region 4 |
| David Garst | District Biologist | Region 1 |
| Jordan Greene | District Biologist | Region 4 |
| Tom Hampton | Regional Lands and Access Manager | Region 3 |
| Mitchell Kern | District Biologist | Region 2 |
| Neil Kester | Conservation Police Officer | Region 4 |
| Matt Kline | Regional Lands and Access Manager | Region 4 |
| Nelson Lafon | Forest Wildlife Program Manager | Statewide |
| Alexandra Lombard | Wildlife Disease Biologist | Statewide |
| Katie Martin | Deer/Bear/Turkey Biologist | Statewide |
| Kathrine McCarty | District Biologist | Region 4 |
| Jason Miller | Hunter Education Coordinator | Region 4 |
| David Norris | Regional Wildlife Manager | Region 1 |
| Sarah Peltier | District Biologist | Region 2 |
| Lisa Stukowski | Regional Wildlife Manager | Region 3 |
| Josh Thomas | Conservation Police Manager - Lieutenant | Region 1 |
| Seth Thompson | District Biologist | Region 4 |

Appendix C. Turkey Population trends, relative density and habitat quality for wild turkeys in Virginia

| County | Habitat Quality | | | 2022-2024 Average Density | | Population Growth | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Available Habitat [1] | HSI Mean Quality [2] | Relative Habitat Quality [3] | Spring harvest [4] (kill/mi$^2$) | Density [5] | Annual Rate of Change (%) [6] | Statistically Significant | Trend [7] |
| Accomack | 320.09 | 0.48 | Low | 0.75 | High | 11 | yes | Increasing |
| Albemarle | 711.22 | 0.65 | High | 0.34 | Low | 1.8 | no | Stable |
| Alleghany | 443.61 | 0.43 | Low | 0.48 | Moderate | 0.7 | no | Stable |
| Amelia | 355.67 | 0.71 | Very High | 0.63 | High | 4.6 | yes | Increasing |
| Amherst | 471.19 | 0.61 | High | 0.55 | Moderate | 0.2 | no | Stable |
| Appomattox | 332.35 | 0.75 | Very High | 0.46 | Moderate | -2.6 | no | Stable |
| Augusta | 958.45 | 0.47 | Low | 0.38 | Low | 6 | yes | Increasing |
| Bath | 528.51 | 0.46 | Low | 0.31 | Low | -2.4 | no | Stable |
| Bedford | 753.77 | 0.67 | High | 0.82 | High | 1.6 | no | Stable |
| Bland | 356.80 | 0.54 | Moderate | 0.56 | Moderate | 1.5 | no | Stable |
| Botetourt | 536.10 | 0.54 | Moderate | 0.58 | Moderate | -0.5 | no | Stable |
| Brunswick | 562.46 | 0.68 | High | 0.65 | High | 10 | yes | Increasing |
| Buchanan | 495.65 | 0.43 | Low | 0.36 | Low | -2.9 | no | Stable |
| Buckingham | 577.28 | 0.71 | Very High | 0.43 | Low | 0.3 | no | Stable |
| Campbell | 496.51 | 0.76 | Very High | 0.56 | Moderate | -1.2 | no | Stable |
| Caroline | 523.15 | 0.63 | High | 0.66 | High | 2.9 | no | Stable |
| Carroll | 472.70 | 0.72 | Very High | 0.86 | High | 4.3 | yes | Increasing |
| Charles City | 175.27 | 0.59 | Moderate | 0.99 | Very High | 4.1 | yes | Increasing |
| Charlotte | 470.47 | 0.75 | Very High | 0.57 | Moderate | -1.2 | no | Stable |
| Chesapeake | 309.91 | 0.39 | Low | 0.38 | Low | 18.5 | yes | Increasing |
| Chesterfield | 388.12 | 0.49 | Low | 0.28 | Low | -0.3 | no | Stable |
| Newport News | 45.20 | 0.28 | Low | 0.10 | Very Low | 4.8 | no | Stable |
| Clarke | 175.06 | 0.51 | Moderate | 1.08 | Very High | 7.6 | yes | Increasing |
| Craig | 328.21 | 0.49 | Low | 0.70 | High | 1.4 | no | Stable |
| Culpeper | 373.68 | 0.64 | High | 0.63 | High | 7.5 | yes | Increasing |
| Cumberland | 296.06 | 0.71 | Very High | 0.70 | High | 0.8 | no | Stable |

| County | Habitat Quality | | | 2022-2024 Average Density | | Population Growth | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Available Habitat [1] | HSI Mean Quality [2] | Relative Habitat Quality [3] | Spring harvest [4] (kill/mi$^2$) | Density [5] | Annual Rate of Change (%) [6] | Statistically Significant | Trend [7] |
| Dickenson | 327.48 | 0.49 | Low | 0.39 | Low | -4.5 | yes | Decreasing |
| Dinwiddie | 496.35 | 0.70 | Very High | 0.62 | High | 5.6 | yes | Increasing |
| Essex | 248.32 | 0.69 | High | 0.92 | Very High | 2.3 | no | Stable |
| Fairfax | 330.21 | 0.35 | Low | 0.05 | Very Low | 4 | no | Stable |
| Fauquier | 641.79 | 0.64 | High | 0.74 | High | 6.4 | yes | Increasing |
| Floyd | 379.33 | 0.74 | Very High | 0.75 | High | 3.9 | yes | Increasing |
| Fluvanna | 285.53 | 0.71 | Very High | 0.51 | Moderate | -0.9 | no | Stable |
| Franklin | 687.45 | 0.70 | Very High | 0.83 | High | 3.9 | yes | Increasing |
| Frederick | 401.24 | 0.60 | High | 1.02 | Very High | 9.2 | yes | Increasing |
| Giles | 354.97 | 0.56 | Moderate | 0.85 | High | 2.3 | no | Stable |
| Gloucester | 202.86 | 0.58 | Moderate | 0.81 | High | 3.8 | no | Increasing |
| Goochland | 277.79 | 0.68 | Very High | 0.56 | Moderate | -2.7 | no | Stable |
| Grayson | 440.65 | 0.68 | High | 0.58 | Moderate | -0.6 | yes | Stable |
| Greene | 154.72 | 0.59 | Moderate | 0.38 | Low | 6 | no | Stable |
| Greensville | 288.56 | 0.70 | Very High | 0.70 | High | 7.4 | yes | Increasing |
| Halifax | 811.80 | 0.76 | Very High | 0.43 | Low | -1.6 | no | Stable |
| Hanover | 454.29 | 0.67 | High | 0.49 | Moderate | 3.7 | no | Stable |
| Henrico | 200.94 | 0.45 | Low | 0.38 | Low | 4.8 | yes | Increasing |
| Henry | 376.32 | 0.66 | High | 0.59 | Moderate | -0.2 | no | Stable |
| Highland | 415.07 | 0.52 | Moderate | 0.29 | Low | 2.4 | no | Stable |
| Isle of Wight | 301.29 | 0.69 | High | 1.41 | Very High | 4.8 | yes | Increasing |
| James City | 126.02 | 0.48 | Low | 0.53 | Moderate | 0.5 | no | Stable |
| King and Queen | 307.68 | 0.67 | High | 0.85 | High | 3.4 | no | Stable |
| King George | 172.32 | 0.60 | High | 0.68 | High | -0.2 | no | Stable |
| King William | 262.33 | 0.65 | High | 0.77 | High | -1.1 | no | Stable |
| Lancaster | 127.53 | 0.61 | High | 1.60 | Very High | 5.5 | yes | Increasing |
| Lee | 430.97 | 0.62 | High | 0.54 | Moderate | 0.8 | no | Stable |

| County | Habitat Quality | | | 2022-2024 Average Density | | Population Growth | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Available Habitat [1] | HSI Mean Quality [2] | Relative Habitat Quality [3] | Spring harvest [4] (kill/mi$^2$) | Density [5] | Annual Rate of Change (%) [6] | Statistically Significant | Trend [7] |
| Loudoun | 469.42 | 0.55 | Moderate | 0.90 | High | 5.8 | yes | Increasing |
| Louisa | 492.39 | 0.69 | High | 0.57 | Moderate | 2.3 | no | Stable |
| Lunenburg | 428.72 | 0.72 | Very High | 0.58 | Moderate | 2.3 | no | Stable |
| Madison | 320.39 | 0.60 | High | 0.46 | Moderate | 6.1 | yes | Increasing |
| Mathews | 76.47 | 0.53 | Moderate | 0.93 | Very High | 9.4 | yes | Increasing |
| Mecklenburg | 612.96 | 0.70 | Very High | 0.63 | High | 5.5 | Yes | Increasing |
| Middlesex | 125.97 | 0.65 | High | 0.69 | High | 4.4 | yes | Increasing |
| Montgomery | 372.47 | 0.55 | Moderate | 0.69 | High | 3.1 | yes | Increasing |
| Nelson | 469.51 | 0.58 | Moderate | 0.36 | Low | 0.7 | no | Stable |
| New Kent | 198.89 | 0.58 | Moderate | 0.78 | High | 3.4 | no | Stable |
| Northampton | 143.20 | 0.43 | Low | 0.43 | Low | -3.1 | no | Stable |
| Northumberland | 183.73 | 0.64 | High | 1.71 | Very High | 6.6 | yes | Increasing |
| Nottoway | 306.99 | 0.72 | Very High | 0.73 | High | 3.7 | no | Stable |
| Orange | 338.40 | 0.68 | High | 0.42 | Low | 1.96 | no | Stable |
| Page | 307.78 | 0.50 | Low | 0.51 | Moderate | 4.3 | no | Stable |
| Patrick | 481.22 | 0.65 | High | 0.56 | Moderate | 2.5 | no | Stable |
| Pittsylvania | 963.63 | 0.77 | Very High | 0.52 | Moderate | 0.04 | yes | Stable |
| Powhatan | 256.53 | 0.69 | High | 0.40 | Low | -3.5 | no | Stable |
| Prince Edward | 346.30 | 0.71 | Very High | 0.49 | Moderate | -3.7 | no | Stable |
| Prince George | 255.43 | 0.65 | High | 0.87 | High | 4.9 | yes | Increasing |
| Prince William | 297.11 | 0.46 | Low | 0.49 | Moderate | 1.4 | no | Stable |
| Pulaski | 313.80 | 0.51 | Moderate | 0.75 | High | 1.8 | no | Stable |
| Rappahannock | 266.36 | 0.62 | High | 0.61 | Moderate | 4.1 | yes | Increasing |
| Richmond | 183.64 | 0.67 | High | 1.53 | Very High | 3.2 | yes | Increasing |
| Roanoke | 239.50 | 0.50 | Moderate | 0.44 | Low | 0.97 | no | Stable |
| Rockbridge | 593.65 | 0.55 | Moderate | 0.58 | Moderate | 0.9 | no | Stable |
| Rockingham | 840.20 | 0.44 | Low | 0.28 | Low | 7.8 | yes | Increasing |

| County | Habitat Quality | | | 2022-2024 Average Density | | Population Growth | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Available Habitat [1] | HSI Mean Quality [2] | Relative Habitat Quality [3] | Spring harvest [4] (kill/mi$^2$) | Density [5] | Annual Rate of Change (%) [6] | Statistically Significant | Trend [7] |
| Russell | 467.84 | 0.64 | High | 0.39 | Low | -1.2 | no | Stable |
| Scott | 534.09 | 0.63 | High | 0.66 | High | -1.1 | no | Stable |
| Shenandoah | 504.13 | 0.54 | Moderate | 0.78 | High | 5.4 | no | Stable |
| Smyth | 447.42 | 0.56 | Moderate | 0.38 | Low | -1.8 | no | Stable |
| Southampton | 589.16 | 0.71 | Very High | 1.06 | Very High | 7.4 | yes | Increasing |
| Spotsylvania | 390.67 | 0.61 | High | 0.27 | Low | 1.4 | no | Stable |
| Stafford | 254.95 | 0.53 | Moderate | 0.27 | Low | -6.7 | yes | Decreasing |
| Suffolk | 376.69 | 0.60 | High | 0.88 | High | 6.98 | yes | Increasing |
| Surry | 271.85 | 0.66 | High | 1.28 | Very High | 3 | yes | increasing |
| Sussex | 482.15 | 0.67 | High | 0.84 | High | 4.6 | yes | increasing |
| Tazewell | 508.05 | 0.56 | Moderate | 0.27 | Low | -3.6 | no | Stable |
| Virginia Beach | 185.97 | 0.34 | Low | 0.15 | Very Low | 24.3 | yes | Increasing |
| Warren | 210.70 | 0.58 | Moderate | 0.77 | High | 6.9 | yes | Increasing |
| Washington | 553.07 | 0.58 | Moderate | 0.44 | Low | -1 | no | Stable |
| Westmoreland | 221.79 | 0.66 | High | 1.37 | Very High | 0.3 | no | Stable |
| Wise | 383.62 | 0.53 | Moderate | 0.42 | Low | -2.5 | no | Stable |
| Wythe | 456.34 | 0.55 | Moderate | 0.71 | High | 0.18 | no | Stable |
| York | 92.54 | 0.44 | Low | 0.49 | Moderate | 7.8 | no | Stable |

[1] Available habitat is the total land area in each county minus locations classified as barren, herbaceous wetlands, or under human development based on the 2021 National Land Cover Database.

[2] Average habitat suitability index (HSI) from suitable habitat only.

[3] Based on cluster analysis, relative habitat quality status (HSI) range from low to very high where:

- Very high > 0.7
- High = 0.6 – 0.69
- Moderate = 0.5 – 0.59
- Low < 0.55

[4] Spring gobbler kill/mi$^2$ of suitable habitat is the index of relative density based on the 3-year average from the 2022 - 2024 spring harvests.

[5] Based on cluster analysis, relative density (gobbler kill/mi$^2$) status range from very low to very high where:

- Very high > 0.92
- High = 0.62 – 0.92

- Moderate = 0.45 – 0.61
- Low = 0.26 – 0.44
- Very Low < 0.26

[6] Based on the 10-year (2015-2024) exponential regression, $N_{10} = N_0 * \lambda^{10}$ ; where $N_{10}$ = spring gobbler kill in 2024, $N_0$ = spring gobbler kill in 2015, and $\lambda$ = finite population rate of change. The average annual growth rate (R) is, $R = 100*(\lambda-1)$.

[7] Trends that were either not significant ($P > 0.1$) or had annual growth between -2.0% and 2.0% were considered stable. Counties with significant trends ($P < 0.1$) and rates that exceeded 2.0% growth were considered increasing. Decreasing counties had significant growth rates less than -2.0%.

Appendix D. Best Management Practices for managing turkey conflicts

**Guidelines for Aggressive and Conflict Wild Turkey Situations**

Prepared by: DWR Forest Game Bird Committee, Fall 2020

Wild turkey populations in Virginia are at or near record levels in most counties. With these populations comes the possibility for negative turkey: human interactions, turkey damage to personal property, and crop depredation. Negative interactions can stem from flocks congregating on public recreation areas (golf courses, parks, recreation fields) and the resulting refuse they leave behind to more serious aggressive behavior towards youth and/or adults. Landowners have reported turkey depredation to crops, most commonly to grapes in the fall and corn seedlings in spring. Increases in vineyards in Virginia may lead to more complaints in the future.

This document is intended to inform Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources staff on the Best Management Practices that are recognized to address conflict situations and aggressive turkey behaviors.

**Note about legal hunting**: For many of the situations listed below, legal hunting of wild turkey during the fall and/or spring seasons may help alleviate turkey populations that have reached levels that can lead to conflict situations. While hunting may not be an immediate option to remediate a conflict situation (due to time of year), it should be discussed with complainants as one option for long term turkey population management.

**Best Management Practices (BMPs)**

**<u>BMPs for Homes, Gardens, and Businesses</u>**

1) Check for foods that may be attracting turkeys to the area. Likely attractants include birdfeeders or other wildlife feeders, freshly sown lawn seed, and domestic fowl feed (cracked corn, scratch, etc).
2) Check for reflective surfaces that birds may be "seeing their reflection" in (vehicle mirrors, vehicle hubcaps, porch or sunroom windows or doors, etc). Cover these areas or apply taping (if possible) to distort or block their image.
    - Vehicles: For turkeys perching on vehicles apply a cover over the vehicle if possible (paying close attention to cover all shiny surfaces).
        i. Activate a car alarm when the bird approaches the vehicle to scare it off.
        ii. Move your vehicle to a different area of the parking lot if possible to minimize interaction.
        iii. Utilize aversive conditioning methods outlined below.
3) Remove all food attractants for a minimum of 2 weeks.
4) Practice aversive conditioning on turkeys after food sources have been removed to discourage continued presence:

- Utilize motion-activated sprinklers around decks, flowerbeds, or other areas.
- Utilize visual detractors that can scare turkeys:
    i. Mylar tape: Attach 2-3' piece to a stake driven into the ground at a 45-60 degree angle so that it moves frequently with even a slight breeze. These should be spaced around the area to be protected such that a turkey(s) will encounter them regardless of their approach to the area.
    ii. Spinning rods: 12" long rods that spin while suspended
    iii. Pinwheels
    iv. Owl and coyote decoys
    v. Balloons (predator eyes)
- Visual detractors work best when moved around the area to be protected frequently so that the turkeys do not become accustomed to them. Their efficacy can be improved when paired with other negative stimuli such as loud noises or the motion activated sprinklers.
- Utilize noise makers such as air cannons, radios, air horns, or other devices that can either be set to go off at spaced intervals on a timer or motion activated.
    i. Always alert nearby property owners before utilizing noise makers that may impact adjoining property owners.

**BMPs for Public Recreation Areas: Golf Courses, Ballfields**

1. Conflict specialist dogs or well-trained herding dogs (border collies, Australian shepherds, etc.) can be used to chase turkeys off public recreation areas under the guidance of a dog handler.
    - Multiple attempts will likely be needed before the turkeys are deterred from the area.
2. No feeding of wildlife (duck ponds for example) should be implemented on these public areas to limit additional food attractants for wild turkeys.
3. Consider Mylar tape and other visual deterrents (see BMPS for Homes, Gardens, and Businesses)

**BMPS for Agriculture**

1. Vineyards:
    - Fencing is the best long-term deterrent to prevent agricultural damage from turkeys (as well as other wildlife species).
    - Guard dogs can be utilized as a deterrent. Breeds such as border collies, some hounds, or flushing bird dogs are generally best.

- Visual detractors as mentioned in the BMPs for homes, gardens, and businesses (Mylar tape, spinning rods, pinwheels, and predator decoys) can all be used around vineyards to detract turkeys.

2. Field Crops (Corn or others)
    - While damage by wild turkeys can occur to field crops, reported damage should be investigated first by a biologist or CPO to determine that turkeys are the actual culprit. Reports of turkeys in a crop field doesn't automatically equal crop damage, often they are only "bugging" within these fields and not damaging the actual crop.

- Visual detractors positioned intermittently around the field perimeter may work as a deterrent when combined with additional methods outlined below.
- Auditory devices such as air cannons, air horns, radios, or others may deter turkeys from field crops when fired at random intervals when turkeys are present.
- Often the vulnerable stage of crop development overlaps with the spring gobbler hunting season. Allowing licensed hunter's access to hunt the property with emphasis around any damage areas may help reduce turkey numbers and ensuing crop damage.

**BMPS for Aggressive Turkeys**

1) Wild turkeys can become aggressive around people at any time of year but increased prevalence in this type of behavior are noted during the spring breeding season. Male birds (gobblers) are most likely to display aggressive behavior towards a person.
    a. Aggressive Behavior may include:
        i. Lack of fear around people
        ii. Approaching, following, jumping on, or wing flapping at or near a person
        iii. Posturing towards a person
2) People that are being threatened by aggressive birds need to stand their ground every time turkeys appear. The following are some recommendations for devices to utilize to help scare the bird away:
    a. Umbrella. Open and close briskly to create "popping" noises
    b. Loud whistle
    c. Marine air horn
    d. Starter or blank pistol
    e. Broom. Wave broom and yell
    f. Water (water hose, strong water gun, or several buckets of water). Douse bird with water if able to get close enough safely.

g. Leashed dog (obviously one that is not afraid of turkeys), barking will help.

Appendix E. Results of Outcome and Objective Surveys of Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) and Technical Committee (TC) Members.

As one of the final products of the Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan, members of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee and the Technical Committee were surveyed to place importance scores on specific Outcomes identified within the plan. The results of the outcome rankings can be see in Figure E1. An additional follow-up survey was provided to the Technical Committee to evaluate the importance rankings for objectives within each goal area. These importance rankings and values will be used by staff to prioritize implementation plans focusing on areas of higher scoring outcomes and objectives.

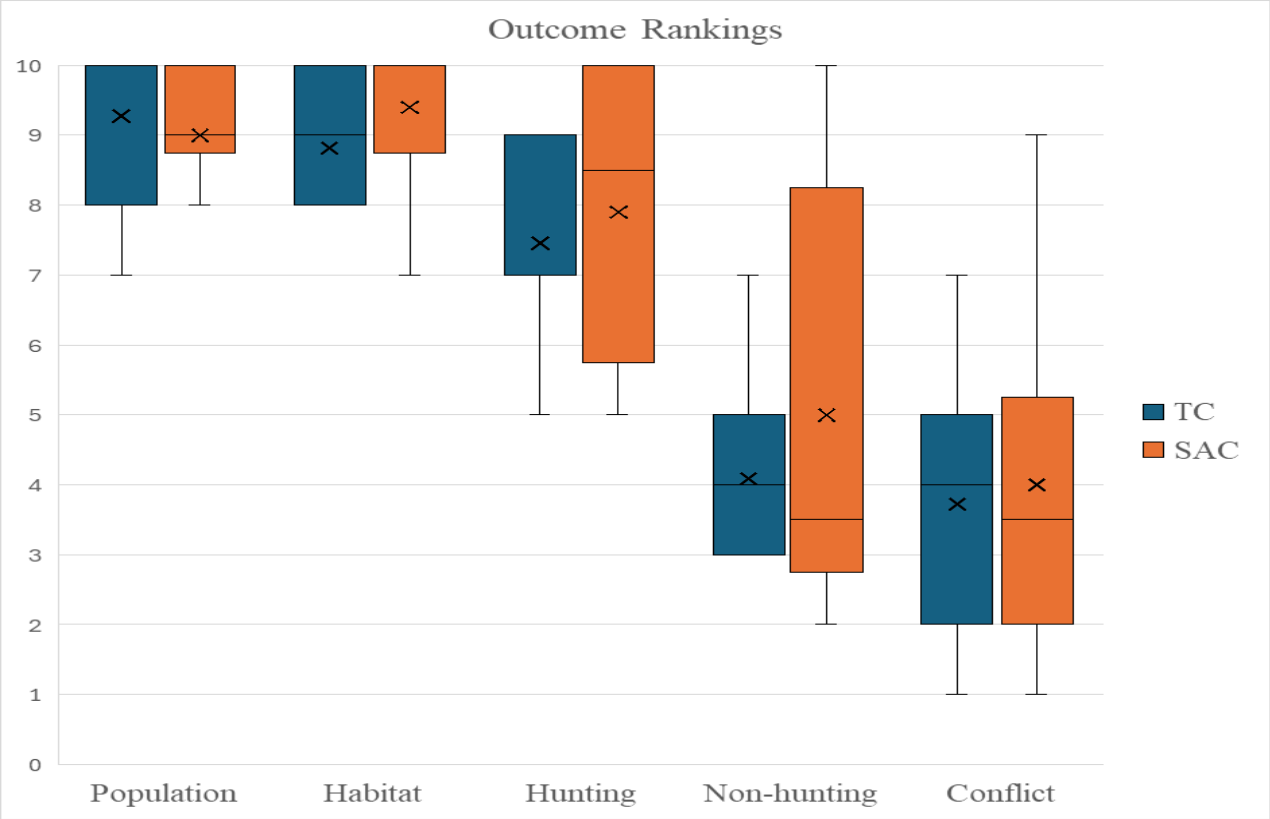


Figure 36. Outcome importance scores reported by members of the Technical Committee (N = 10) and the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (N = 9), where 10 was the most important and 1 was the least important. Box plots show mean (x), 50% of responses (within boxes), and range (to ends of tails).

Table 2. Ranking of plan objectives, within each goal area, by members of the Technical Committee (N = 10). A lower mean rank signifies a higher priority within the goal area.

| TC Ranking (mean) | Wild Turkey Management Plan Objectives |
|---|---|
| **Population Goal** | |
| 1.3 | To meet and maintain turkey population objectives in each county management unit |
| 3.4 | Manage factors that may be limiting the attainment of turkey population objectives. |
| 4.2 | To biennially assess, and update as necessary, turkey population objectives in each county management unit |
| 3.7 | To annually assess and update turkey population status in each management unit |
| 5.0 | To develop and/or continue site-specific population management programs within management units. |
| 3.3 | To investigate and evaluate alternative population monitoring methodologies (approaches) for turkeys |
| **Habitat Goal** | |
| 3.0 | To update and evaluate the turkey habitat status in each management unit every five years |
| 1.9 | To identify management units where habitat is a limiting factor for achieving turkey population and recreation goals |
| 1.8 | Promote appropriate turkey habitat management especially in management units where habitat is a limiting factor for achieving turkey population, recreation, and conflict goals. |
| 3.3 | Increase stakeholder awareness, support, and tolerance for turkey habitat management including the need for management and method used |
| **Recreation Goal** | |
| 2.0 | Monitor turkey hunter satisfactions and constraints to hunting participation in Virginia to maintain fall and spring turkey hunter satisfactions at the adequate level, as measured by the biannual hunter survey, |
| 5.5 | To determine non-hunting turkey recreation demands, desires, and satisfactions, and inform the public about non-hunting recreational opportunities. |
| 2.4 | Maintain turkey hunting quality by preserving diverse types of hunting opportunities (fall and spring) |
| 4.2 | Provide for appropriate turkey hunting allocation between traditional fall turkey hunters and opportunistic fall hunters |
| 3.8 | Annually monitor and minimize turkey hunting incidents in both the spring and fall hunting seasons |

| | |
|---|---|
| 3.1 | Promote turkey hunting methods that are sportsmanlike and ethical |
| **Conflict Goal** | |
| 3.5 | Monitor and assess agricultural, residential, recreational, and airport wild turkey conflicts |
| 2.9 | To implement and review best management practices (for the public and agency) that utilize both non-lethal and lethal options for managing turkey conflicts |
| 3.3 | To develop policies and protocols for alternative approaches to managing site specific turkey conflicts when hunting is ineffective, unacceptable, or not feasible |
| 1.6 | Maintain and expand prohibitions on feeding wildlife especially as they pertain to disease and human habituation |
| 3.7 | Increase stakeholder support for turkey conflict management methods and tolerance for turkey related conflicts |

Appendix F. Summary of Public Comments.

Following is a summary of 349 comments offered by 133 individuals who reviewed the draft 2025-2034 Virginia Wild Turkey Management Plan during March 7 – April 4, 2025. Numerous comments contained multiple recommendations. Duplicates were not recorded more than once; the numbers in parentheses represent the number of times a similar comment was recorded. Full comments are available upon request.

*Below each category of comments, text in italics explains whether and how these comments were incorporated into the Plan.*

**Population**

- Turkey populations are declining (multiple localities) (10)
- Public Land populations are too low (7)
- Populations are healthy (various localities) (2)
- Need to make changes before too late (7)
- Increase carrying capacity where populations are too low (1)
- Not enough being done for turkeys (1)
- Research effects of poultry litter (1)
- Predator populations are a problem (14)
- Provide incentives for people to remove predators (i.e. earn a tag, financial incentive) (5)
- Improve research on the effects of predator populations (3)
- Provide classes or trainings to increase trapping knowledge and awareness (4)
- Need to increase/fund research into population declines (2)
- Move away from harvest as the main focus for monitoring (3)
- Need to improve surveys, including brood survey and citizen science opportunities (4)
- Would like to see the research goals and funding mechanisms more clearly articulated (2)
- "Economically feasible" monitoring should not be the focus, enlist citizen science to improve data collection, open access to monitoring on private lands (1)
- Would like to see more specific management actions defined in the management plan (1)
- Develop management zones to adjust season or bag limits (1)
- "Publicly acceptable" should not be used in the plan, feelings of the public should not be factored in, management decisions should be fact based (1)
- Implement a voluntary turkey management stamp (5)
- Closely monitor fall hen harvest trends and adjust season lengths or bag limits if data indicate negative impacts on turkey populations, particularly in regions experiencing declines (1)
- Evaluate the timing of spring seasons to minimize disturbance during peak breeding and nesting periods, ensuring that reproductive success is not inadvertently reduced (1)
- Consider strategies to address hunting pressure on public lands, where high hunter densities may affect both population dynamics and the quality of the hunting experience (habitat improvement on public lands may help) (1)

- Engage the hunting community in discussions about regulation adjustments to balance biological sustainability with hunter expectations.

*In general, the Plan articulates many of the concerns outlined in the comments concerning population levels. The general concern for declining populations or populations below desired levels, are generally covered under the Population Goal, Objective 1 and Objective 3, including county level population objectives. Additionally, concerns for public land populations being below the desired level are covered under the Population Goal 1, Objective 1. Several comments directly implicated predators as the limiting factor for populations; the plan addresses the need to identify limiting factors, to include predators under the Population goal, Objective 2. However, the need to fully describe research priorities and more clearly articulate the strategies affected by research needs were clarified to specify where additional research was needed (Population Goal 1, Objective 2, and Objective 3). Comments regarding the need to update surveys, monitoring, or investigate harvest-based monitoring are already covered under the Population Goal, Objectives 4 and 6.*

**Habitat**

- Increase forest management on public lands (13)
- Improve habitat on public land (6)
- Increase use of prescribed fire (9)
- Encourage/improve private land habitat management (access to consultation, trainings, etc.) (6)
- Provide tax incentives for creating habitat on private land (2)
- Improve habitat in general (not specific to public or private) (5)
- Stop prescribed burning during turkey hunting season and/or nesting season (3)
- Target greenspace and buffers for conservation in urbanizing areas (1)
- Investigate emerging land uses and impacts to turkeys (1)
- Would like to see more habitat focus, promoting awareness of opportunities (1)
- Notify people when prescribed fires are planned (1)
- Collaborate with the U.S. Forest Service and Virginia Department of Forestry to ensure forest management strategies prioritize wildlife habitat, particularly through appropriate timber rotation schedules (125 years or less) and prescribed burning.(1)
- Support economically viable timber harvesting on public lands to fund habitat restoration without over-reliance on taxpayer-funded programs, ensuring long-term sustainability of forest management.(1)
- In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and the Virginia Department of Forestry, promote the use of sustainably sourced timber products from both public and private lands, reducing reliance on imported and often less sustainable alternatives. (1)

*The Plan articulates many of the concerns that were brought forward in the comment period regarding habitat management needs. The need for improved habitat on public lands through forestry, prescribed fire, or other means was the most common comment. Additional comments*

*for improved management on private lands are also echoed in the comments. The plan does specifically discuss the need for improved management of these lands in the Habitat Goal, Objective 2 and 3. Awareness of available management options to include technical assistance, workshops, or other tools are covered under the Habitat Goal, Objective 4.*

**Recreation**

- Increase Law enforcement of turkey violations and trespassing (increased presence, increased penalties) (4)
- Close or delay opening gates during spring turkey season to better disperse pressure or limit over harvesting on public lands (3)
- Open more gates or expand access during turkey season, especially for older hunters (2)
- Expand access opportunities (VPA-HIP, access agreements, purchase more land, etc.) (2)
- There is a need to address non-resident hunter demands (2)
- Population needs to be increased before R3 efforts are undertaken, there are already more hunters than the population can support, R3 efforts should be paused until 75% of counties reach or exceed population objectives (1)
- I appreciate the commitment to preserving the tradition of fall hunting seasons (1)
- Eliminate dog hunting or training (2)
- Need to revisit discussion of ethics with stakeholders to include discussions over reaping, decoy use, rifles, etc. (1)
- Improve hunter safety section of plan to include reaping or fanning and new technology or techniques (1)
- Improve communication of hunting incidents to promote awareness (1)
- Strengthen partnerships with private landowners to expand voluntary access programs that provide quality hunting opportunities (1)
- Maintain a strong public land hunting system by ensuring that public lands are actively managed for game species and remain accessible to hunters (1)

*Although many of the comments received pertain to recreational hunting, relatively few comments were specifically geared towards improvements in the recreation goal area. The largest number of comments in this section specifically pertained to access related issues. An additional potential strategy was added under the Recreation Goal, Objective 3 to evaluate potential access issues specifically on public lands. Another strategy in that section already discusses the need to promote access to additional lands. The need for increased law enforcement is covered under the Population Goal, Objective 1. Additional comments referring to the safety or ethics of various techniques are generally covered under the Recreation Goal, Objective 5 and 6.*

**Turkey plan in general**

- General positive comments (Encouraged to see the effort, impressed with plan, step in the right direction, etc.) (11)
- General negative comments (a lot of bureaucratic info, hard to read, hard to make comments) (2)

- The plan does not make it clear what actions the public should do to improve turkey populations, might be helpful to have PowerPoint or presentation that goes along with the plan to describe the plan in short format (1)
- Defend the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation against policies or movements that seek to reduce hunting opportunities or shift management away from its scientific foundations (1)

*No changes were made as a result of these comments. However, staff will be working to improve the effective communication and dissemination of information in the turkey plan. Improving communications on turkey management are specifically mentioned in several objectives including Population Goal, Objective 2, Habitat Goal, Objective 4, Conflict Goal, Objectives 2 and 5. Additional summary documents and quick reference guides could improve the utility of the plan moving forward.*

**Hunting Regulation Recommendations**

- Decrease the season bag limit to 2 birds (35)
- Prohibit the use of rifles in spring season (29)
- Prevent or minimize the harvest of hens (gobbler only or reduce hen harvest) (17)
- Move the spring season earlier (12)
- Limit or prohibit the harvest of jakes (12)
- Reduce the non-resident bag limit (16)
- Limit non-resident hunting (not specific) (3)
- Limit the season for non-resident hunters (5)
- Increase the price of non-resident license (1)
- Ban or prohibit reaping or fanning (9)
- Prohibit the harvest of bearded hens in spring season (5)
- Close the spring season at noon for the full season (5)
- Move the spring season 1 week later (2)
- Reduce or close the fall hunting season (6)
- Close the fall season (6)
- Shorten the spring hunting season (no more than 4 weeks) (4)
- Close the season (Amherst, Bath counties) (3)
- Allow all-day hunting through the full spring season (2)
- Increase the overlap between fall deer seasons and fall turkey seasons (3)
- Increase fall hunting opportunities in the current 2-week counties (2)
- Allow Veterans on Youth/Apprentice hunting weekend (1)
- Do not hunt turkeys (1)
- No gobbler harvest in the fall (1)
- Simplify fall seasons (1)
- Keep bag limit at 3 birds (1)
- Increase fall hunting opportunities (1)
- Allow hen harvest during the spring season (1)

- Bag limit, tags should depend on populations in area you are hunting (1)

*No changes were made to the Plan based on these comments. Although hunting as a tool and recreational pursuit is guided by objectives and strategies under Population, Recreation, and Conflict goals, specific hunting seasons and regulations are beyond the scope of a strategic plan. Hunting seasons are established by the DWR Board, with input from DWR staff and the public, through the biennial regulation review and amendment process. Calls for a decreased bag limit, minimizing the hen harvest, eliminating jake harvest, etc. reiterates that many hunters feel the populations are below desired population levels, which is addressed in the Population Goal, Objective 1. Additionally comments about prohibiting rifle hunting (primarily from a safety concern) or preventing the use of the fanning or reaping hunting tactic suggest a significant concern for safety, addressed in the Recreation Goal, Objective 5 and 6. The emerging concern for impacts on the population from non-resident hunters were addressed in the Population Goal, Objective 2.*