

Further Comparisons from the Turkey Production Index Survey

- DNR personnel recorded turkey observations while performing field duties during June, July and August.
- From the Long Range report both Hens/observer (3.0) and Poults/hen (1.1, ties 3 worst years, 2007, 2009 & 2014) were worse than the 4-year average (2013-16).
- Also, Poults/Observer (10.2) was down 28%, Poults+Hens (3,400) was down 21% and Percentage of hens with poults (30%) was down 18% over the 4-year average. The Poults/Observer was the worst since 2009, Poults+Hens was the worst since 1996 and Percentage of hens with poults was worst documented.
- Looking further at the Regional level some differences occur.
 - Poults/Observer was up for the Ridge & Valley (23.4, up 5%) over the 4-year average; whereas, it was down for the Blue Ridge Mountains (11.1, down 24%), Piedmont (7.6, down 37% and worst since 1978), Upper Coastal Plain (6.9, down 41% and worst since 2007) and Lower Coastal Plain (8.4, down 51%).
 - We first started recording observations on Gobblers during the reproductive season in 2006. Gobblers seen was up for Ridge & Valley (168, up 23%), Blue Ridge Mountains (128, up 15%) and Upper Coastal Plain (275, up 15%) over the 4-year average; whereas, it was down for the Piedmont (293, down 17%) and the Lower Coastal Plain (62, down 57% worst since 2008).
 - We first started recording observations on Hen to Gobbler ratios during the reproductive season in 2006. The Hen to Gobbler Ratio was up for Ridge and Valley (2.3, up 10%) and Lower Coastal Plain (2.6, up 20%) over the 4-year average; whereas, the Piedmont (1.5, down 14%) and Upper Coastal Plain (1.3, down 37%). The Blue Ridge Mountains (2.0) was essentially the same as the 4-year average.
- Statewide, the 2017 Turkey Reproductive Season was a poor season and the worst overall season documented. This after the 2012-15 period which was the worst recorded 4-year period. We've only had once fair season (2016) in the past six years with all the other years being poor.

Further Comparisons from the Turkey Hunting Population Index Survey

- The turkey hunting population is indexed through cooperators reporting their daily hunting statistics throughout the turkey hunting season.
- From the 2018 Long Range Report, turkeys seen/hour (0.45, down 15%) was down and gobblers heard/hour (0.4) was equal compared to the previous 4-year averages.
- More cooperators participated in 2018 (523) than the 4-year average (494). The effort was up for number of hours hunted (19,779.4, up 4%), down for trips/cooperator (10.5, down 5%) and down for hours/cooperator (37.8, down 2%) over the 4-year average.
- Turkeys seen (8,822) was 13% worse than the 4-year average (10,090). We've had 5 seasons of splitting out gobblers and hens seen. The hours it took to see a gobbler was 4.8 and that 6% worse than the 4-year average (4.5). The hours to see a hen took 4.2 and was 19% worse than the 4-year average (3.4).
 - Regionally, the hours it took to see a turkey compared to the 4-year average are as follows: Ridge & Valley (1.6, worst by 13%), Blue Ridge Mountains (2.4, worst by 21%), Piedmont (2.8, worst by 4%), Upper Coastal Plain (2.2, worst by 14%) and Lower Coastal Plain (1.2, better by 14%). Hours to see a gobbler comparisons were as follows: Ridge & Valley (4.1, worst by 17%), Blue Ridge Mountains (6.3, worst by 17%), Piedmont (6.1, better by 2%), Upper Coastal Plain (4.1, worst by 10%) and Lower Coastal Plain (2.7, better by 10%). Hours to see a hen comparisons were as follows: Ridge & Valley (2.8, worst by 18%), Blue Ridge Mountains (3.9, worst by 26%), Piedmont (5.3, worst by 15%), Upper Coastal Plain (4.5, worst by 27%) and Lower Coastal Plain (2, same).
- Gobblers heard (7,816) was up (2%) from the 4-year average (7,686).
 - Regionally, hours it took to hear a gobbler compared to the 4-year average were the following: Ridge & Valley (2.3, worst by 4% and equals 2017), Blue Ridge Mountains (3.9, worst by 15%), Piedmont (3.1, equaled), and Upper Coastal Plain (2.1, equaled) and Lower Coastal Plain (1.8, better by 14%).
- Hunter success (48) was the worst since 2001, second worst ever and 17% worse than the 4-year average (58%). The 2016-18 3-year period (51.9% average) is the worst 3-year period that has been documented. The percentage of hunters who did not harvest a turkey was 52% (worst since 2001) and was down 20% from the 4-year average (41.8%). For those hunters that harvested 1 gobbler (17.7%) it was 31% lower than the 4-year average (25.6%) and worst documented. For those who harvested 2 gobblers (12.9%) it was the second worst recorded (2017) and 9% lower than the 4-year average (14.1%). Those hunters that took of assisted in taking 3+ gobblers (17.3%) was down 6% from the 4-year average (18.4%). The 2016-18 period (15.6%) in taking 3+ gobblers was the worst 3 years since 2001-03. It took 32.6 hours to harvest a turkey and was equal to last year (32.5) and was which was 9% worse than the 4-year average (29.6).
 - Regionally, the hours it took to harvest a gobbler was down for all but 1 region compared to the 4-year average: Ridge & Valley (53.4, worst by 52% and worst since 2002), Blue Ridge Mountains (44.8, worst by 12% and worst since 2009), Piedmont (43.1, worst by 8%), Upper Coastal Plain (26.2, worst by 15%). However, the Lower Coastal Plain (12.6, was better by 37% and best since 2012).

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- Even though we had a fair 2016 reproductive season which carried over to a marginally better 2017 hunting season, it was followed by what may have been the worst documented reproductive season we've experienced in 2017. Therefore, the 2017 reproductive season nullified the 2016 reproductive season over a large part of the state and is why the 2018 hunting season was overall worse than in 2017.
- Ninety-three percent of the state is privately held, therefore private landowners' actions will determine what happens with our turkey population. We are losing turkey habitat (especially turkey nesting and poult rearing habitat) and are continuing to suffer regional declines in quality and quantity of turkey habitat leading to an overall lower turkey population than occurred in the previous decades. It is becoming more common to have local population declines in certain areas of the state, however some areas are still seeing increasing populations, likely a direct result of changing habitat conditions. For these reasons it is critical that we continue to monitor turkey populations closely into the future. One of the most important things to consider when managing turkeys is the effect of harvest and the ability to carry over adult birds into the next year. One of our best Wildlife Management Areas in the state has averaged approximately 3 gobblers harvested/square mile (640 acres). I would recommend using a lower number of 2 gobblers or less harvested per square mile for hunting clubs as a turkey harvest guideline (or an easy rule of thumb of 1/500 acres).