



Let's Talk Turkey

Lesson activity – Wild Turkey Management

Wild Turkey Habitat and Habits

Habitat Maintenance

Maintain an open understory in woodland. Turkeys thrive where openings comprise as little as 5 percent of the total area and as much as 50 percent. To retain turkeys throughout the year on heavily forested land or to attract them during the spring, provide openings of 5-20 acres. Long narrow openings are provided by utility rights-of-way, or by widening logging roads. Prescribed burning, brush control, release cutting, and other practices may be used in maintaining turkey foods in woodland. Prescribed burning increases the stands of annual grasses, wild legumes and other desirable foods of the wild turkey, especially in pine woodland. Maintain in early stages of succession by periodic mowing, disking, burning or other means. Vegetation in openings should be no higher than one foot, especially during most of the growing season. Improved pastures provide excellent feeding areas for hens and older poults. Mow ungrazed or lightly grazed openings during mid-summer to stimulate new growth and to prevent such areas from becoming too thick. Avoid mowing during nesting season. Restrict mowing in areas of turkey habitat between mid March and early June. Field edges should provide a subtle transition from woodland to opening, allowing poults to have access to cover when feeding in fields. This can be done by thinning trees along field edges or allowing edges to revert to brushy cover. If fields or pastures are heavily grazed, build fences several yards out from the woodlands to prevent cows from cleanly grazing field edges. Young pine plantations are low quality turkey habitat when compared to mature pine, pine-hardwood and hardwood forests. Restrict pine management to sites best suited to pine production. Small pine plantings of less than 1/2 acre in size may increase habitat diversity for turkey because they provide thermal cover and roost sites. Leave hardwood dominated drains and stream bottoms uncut when harvesting or establishing pine stands. Retain soft and hard mast producers in uplands. Thin pine stands as liberally as needed. Prescribe burn as soon as the tree height in young stands allows safe burning. Restrict management activities such as prescribed burning during nesting season.

Home Range/Populations

The number of turkeys that an area can support is termed the carrying capacity. This level is determined by several factors which include: disease, parasitism, and predation. Many predator populations are at an all time high. Predation accounts for the main cause of nest failure, egg loss, hen mortality, and probably poult



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mortality. Populations vary a good bit from year to year, depending primarily on reproductive success.

Predation of hens and eggs seems to be the main factor affecting reproductive success.

Disease and parasitism are density-dependent factors, and concentrations of wild turkeys on a small area increases the probability of occurrence and spread of diseases and parasites. Concentrations can also increase the probability of predation and poaching. This can be avoided by not using feeders or spreading corn as bait. Aflatoxin contamination is also possible from moldy corn.

Studies have indicated that the average range of most wild turkeys in the southeast is about 640 acres and is irregular in shape. Fall turkey population estimates have varied from 2-32 birds per square mile of range. There is both a fall and spring hunting season on gobblers in many parts of Alabama where populations are dense enough to warrant such hunting. In other parts of the state, there is only a spring season. The population is so low in some places that no hunting is permitted. Keep disturbances to a minimum, especially from March to June, as this is nesting season.

- Restrict timber cutting to small areas. Extensive cutting causes turkeys to change their range.
- Restrict human activity, especially March through

August

- Keep livestock and stray dogs out of turkey range
- Prevent wildfires; and any fires during nesting season
- Avoid mowing open fields during the nesting period.

From: USDA Wild Turkey Management Guide