

3rd Wild Turkey Stakeholder Meeting

February 8, 2016

Attendance

- Neil Bien, Northeast Regional Advisory Board Member
- Collin Smith, National Wild Turkey Federation
- Mike McKernan, National Wild Turkey Federation
- Mark DeVries, South Dakota Stock Growers Association
- Leonard Spomer, Central Regional Advisory Board Member
- Dean Schueler, National Wild Turkey Federation
- Terry Mayes, Western Regional Advisory Board Member
- Tom Kirschenmann, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Chad Switzer, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Keith Fisk, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Nathan Baker, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Travis Runia, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Alex Solem, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Chad Lehman, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Paul Coughlin, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Cindy Longmire, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Jacquie Ermer, SD Game, Fish and Parks
- Cliff Stone, SD Game, Fish and Parks (conference phone)
- John Kanta, SD Game, Fish and Parks (conference phone)
- Josh Delger, SD Game, Fish and Parks (conference phone)

General Stakeholder topics of discussion

- **Discussion #1: Insertions to draft plan yet to be completed**
 - Executive summary
 - Implementation table
 - Proposed new unit boundary map (consistent spring and fall turkey units)
 - Table 14 updates → license number minimum threshold for prairie units
- **Discussion #2: Use of Centerfire Rifles**
 - Eliminate for spring season, possibly keep for fall season if we have to; deer hunters already in the field
 - Objective in plan for a public opinion survey regarding this topic
 - Stakeholders getting comments that people know it's coming and understand why, but some may not want to see it go
 - GFP willing to do a public opinion survey and look at results before taking a recommendation to Commission

- Survey would include both Black Hills and Prairie units and look at difference between keeping in fall but not in spring, or restricting the use of centerfire rifles for turkey in general
 - Take away for spring season first, then see where GFP goes from there
 - Don't want a blanket question, need to drill down to what specific support there is
 - What is crossover between hunters in only fall or spring or hunters in both seasons
 - Use a filter question
 - Prefer only one survey
 - May need to look at how hunter sample is collected
 - If survey indicates to remove rifle for both seasons, pursue this option
 - Reasons to support removal in spring but not necessarily in fall
 - Safety, lots of decoys being used in spring and different techniques that could lead to fatal accidents
 - Promotion of sport to call in a turkey
 - Fall is a management season, rifle ok to get turkeys killed
 - Also already have rifle hunters in the fall for deer/antelope season
 - In fall, hunters are also required to wear orange for the other hunting seasons
 - Not much accident data for rifle related fatalities
 - Most states have gone away with rifles, shotgun accidents are more prevalent because this is the most common method of turkey hunting
 - 1999 was last rifle related fatality for turkey hunting in South Dakota
 - Approach it more as how the sport has changed, more rewarding to call the gobbler in and less about rifle fatality
 - Any recommendation to Commission would be for the 2017 spring turkey season
 - Good to have stakeholders present at commission to provide their feedback on this topic
- **Discussion #3: Hard Triggers & General Plan Comments**
 - Like that it states when and what will be done when a trigger is met, very transparent to the public on why GFP does what it does
 - Positive feedback from several stakeholders
 - Built in flexibility to be a true adaptive management plan
 - Parameters are huge step forward for the state
 - Pleased to see Walk-In Area program brought up for a Spring Turkey season → Strategy 5.b
 - GFP will look into it this but don't be disappointed if participation from landowners is low
 - If try and fail, GFP will at least be able to tell the public why it hasn't taken hold

- **Discussion #4: Number of licenses/tags per hunter**
 - “Agencies do not have values, people have values” in text, however, agencies affect peoples’ values
 - Having multiple tags tends to cheapen or reduce the value of a species when you can get multiple licenses for a single species
 - “Fat Takers”
 - Don’t want to get the idea to kill species instead of hunt them, need to appreciate the species
 - Keep multiple tags to a bare minimum
 - OK with multiple tags if for different units but not a pocket full of tags in fall season for same unit
 - Upsetting to landowners to see public come on their land with a handful of turkey tags
 - Landowner has some responsibility to know what turkey population they have on their land and let hunters know how many turkeys they can take
 - Matching biological data with tag allocation will be an ongoing shortcoming of agency, some years too few tags and some years too many tags to meet population goals

- **Discussion #5: Narrative or sufficient paragraph about turkey management in South Dakota**
 - Consolidate pertinent information that is scattered throughout plan
 - Recreational importance
 - Economic importance
 - Black Hills are a premiere destination for turkey
 - Could even be more important than elk
 - Nowhere near as important as pheasants statewide but very important to Black Hills
 - What is actual economic impact of turkeys in South Dakota
 - Several opinion surveys going on or will be coming soon but nothing specifically targeting turkeys
 - Averaging \$1,200 a hunter for western turkey hunting
 - Maybe subjectively mention what turkey economics are
 - Social tolerance
 - Explain why South Dakota will not likely let the birds get to high populations like the 2006-2008 time period
 - Address the issues and challenges of managing turkeys in South Dakota
 - Possibly address in executive summary
 - Half page long or so would be a good length
 - \$6-7 million for whole of South Dakota and \$2.8 million for spring turkey in Black Hills; dated information from Southwick Associates
 - Need to start hearing positive promotion of turkeys in the state
 - Get current economic impact of turkey

- We already know that turkeys are important economically, getting a current value would improve how the agency can promote the importance of turkeys
- Turkeys are worth more alive than killed from depredation
- **Discussion #6: Progress report on where we are with plan**
 - Send out progress report in 2018
 - Does not have to be comprehensive but acknowledge accomplishments and what still needs to be done
- **Discussion #7: License allocations and season length**
 - License allocation of 1, 2, and 5 tags per hunter originally in harvest strategy table, now it is unlimited for high abundance strategy
 - Time seasons to be Nov-Jan, not to be restricted to just December-January in low abundance years
 - Want to keep season time consistent from year to year to keep it simple for hunters
 - No longer flexible with season length, compensate with tag allocation for each management strategy
 - Have more tags available but for a shorter season
 - Want season to coincide with deer season so that hunters have opportunity to hunt both species
- **Discussion #8: Boundary of Northern Black Hills Unit**
 - Boundary split across highway, what is justification for spring boundary?
 - Question posed to John Kanta (western regional wildlife manager): this was before his time with the department but his understanding is that 15-20 years ago, group of folks came to Commission to add this area to the Black Hills unit
 - No biological or depredation reason for the little “finger”
 - Have tried to get it removed (2014 and 2012) but public and guide service have come up with recommendation to keep this area in the unit and commission has agreed
 - Used to be part of Fort Meade public land, now all private
 - Lots of turkeys in this area; if they aren’t hunted, it could lead to a depredation problem
 - Distinct area, birds don’t move around a lot
 - This is a spring season that is controlled by the landowners
 - Most of this area is a pay to hunt area for turkeys, Kanta does not expect depredation issues
 - Landowners who provide guide services are not eligible for depredation assistance or a depredation hunt
 - Boundary includes both of these ranches, but actual boundary follows distinct roads
 - This area realistically belongs in the prairie (limited) instead of the Black Hills (unlimited) unit

- The “finger” area does not make the agency look good
 - From a biological perspective, “finger” should be considered prairie
 - If there is biological science behind including in a prairie unit, it should be recommended to Commission to redesign the boundary and move it from Black Hills to Prairie unit
 - May need to manage hills in fall season as north, central, and southern hills for better population management in spring
 - North hills (migratory) are likely very different survival population than prairie birds in hogback area (residential)
- **Discussion #9: Removal of hen harvest in spring**
 - Not any opposition from stakeholders
 - Ethically not good to harvest hens in spring, could be carrying eggs or sitting on nest
- **Discussion #10: Prairie hunter success**
 - How is this calculated?
 - 1st tag success regardless of number of tags a hunter had with a license
 - Managing units by hunter success but not reporting complete hunter success if he/she has multiple tags
 - Able to capture the actual number of birds taken but 1st tag success is the only consistent number GFP can get from hunters
- **Discussion #11: Northeastern turkey unit/value the species**
 - If limit boundary for northeast unit, also limit number of hunters but issue double tag; this way landowner is not getting inundated with hunters but still getting the target number of birds killed
 - If go with single tags, half of the hunters are likely not going to get permission to hunt from landowners
 - Need to limit number of birds per hunter, otherwise turkeys will lose their value
 - Can harvest lots of snow geese so they have been nicknamed sky carp
 - Need some consistency between spring and fall season for same area, if you have strict hunting in one season and very liberal in the other, looks bad
 - Fosters disrespect of resource when flip flop number of birds per hunter in between seasons
 - “Shoulder” Antlerless season (Montana Elk) before/after regular season and hunters are gutting females and finding fetuses in their harvested animals, off-putting to the public
 - Balance between everyone getting a tag and meeting number of birds taken to please landowners
 - When possible, distribute tags evenly
 - Only 5% of hunters will pick up multiple tags, GFP looked at this recently

- Hunting has changed over time, used to be a rare thing and very exciting to get that one gobbler in the spring, now able to harvest multiple birds or hens during fall season
- Issue multiple tags when applicable but try not to allow multiple birds per hunter if its unnecessary
- **Discussion #12: Promote hunting economics in the State of South Dakota**
 - Promote economic importance of all species not just pheasants
 - Black Hills is a premiere destination and well known for getting a “Grand Slam”
 - Update data from 2006 turkey book with 2016 data from Southwick Associates
 - Tell the story of the importance of turkey in South Dakota, showcase desire by resident and non-resident hunters to come to South Dakota, management issues, depredation, social tolerance, etc.
 - Southwick Associates will provide an economic value in December 2016 (hunting and recreational economics) broken out by region, not species specific; able to provide an economic value to present with and complement what Department of Ag produces ever year to show how important agriculture is to the State of South Dakota
 - Strategy: importance of turkeys, must have to be able to strongly defend the economic importance numbers
 - Need to call out what residents are bringing in for hunting within the state, not just non-residents for all species
 - Hunting affects choices for vehicles, tires, insurance, dogs, ammo
 - Sporting goods stores stay in business because of the residents (meat and potatoes); nonresident hunters are the gravy on top
 - Residents outspend non-residents way more than we think
 - Ask Southwick Associates what they did for economic analysis for National Wild Turkey Federation
 - Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce for waterfowl numbers, thought high bird numbers would bring in lots of money → need to get tourism on our side but also work on educating them
 - Resident hunters are not getting the respect they deserve for spending money in the state
- **Clarifications for stakeholders**
 - Late 2000s: Clarify what this means → later part of the first decade, page 4
 - This could be interpreted incorrectly in the future
 - Game Farm Turkeys: Page 77 – remove populations, can have detriment on management of wild turkeys
 - Split Spring Prairie Seasons: Split normal spring season into two seasons, hunter has to pick which season they want to hunt in, example is how Lincoln and Davison counties season dates currently function
 - Helps spread hunters around so landowners are not overwhelmed and hunters are not packed into a unit

- **General comments**

- Management Plan process was well received, first meeting was a bit chaotic but the second meeting was very helpful and informative
- South Dakota turkey management plan is one of the most comprehensive in the country
- Turkeys in eastern South Dakota are still in its infancy; landowners and GFP staff still learning how to deal with them
- South Dakota has more turkeys now than it ever has (excluding 2006-2008)
- Don't degrade a species when its population is high; at one point in time that species was struggling or could struggle in the future

Additional outreach efforts

- 2-week internal Department review.
- 30-day public comment (around April 1), news releases, radio announcements.
- Present to the Commission in May.