



# Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

## Florida Wild Turkey Permit 2023-24 Annual Report

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### Florida Wild Turkey Permit

Section 379.354(8)(b)(i), *Florida Statutes*, establishes the fee for an annual Florida turkey permit for a resident or nonresident to take wild turkeys within the state or its coastal waters to be \$10 for residents and \$125 for nonresidents. Revenue generated from the sale of wild turkey permits or that pro rata portion of any license that includes turkey hunting privileges provided for in this subparagraph shall be used for conservation, research, and management of wild turkeys to promote the cultural heritage of hunting. Furthermore, the Commission shall prepare an annual report documenting the use of funds generated and shall submit the report to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President of the Senate no later than September 1 of each year.

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## Executive Summary

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This report documents the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) use of Wild Turkey Permit funds during Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-24. Permit fund revenues and expenditures totaled \$1,291,423 and \$704,378, respectively. Program activities encompassed management projects; wild turkey habitat restoration; data collection, management, and analysis; technical assistance; and research and development. Funding for 21 management projects on 16 conservation areas and four regional focal areas was cost-shared with the Florida Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and the Florida Forest Service (FFS) for a total funding amount of \$357,989. When considering other co-operator dollars and in-kind services, the total wild turkey cost-share program is valued at \$1,834,810 for 2023-24.

During May of 2024, staff contracted with Responsive Management to conduct a telephone survey of hunters to estimate the 2024 spring turkey season harvest at 14,513. The survey also determined that an estimated 5,917 youth hunters participated in the special Youth Turkey Season and harvested 2,337 turkeys.

United States Forest Service, NWTF, FFS, and FWC continue to cooperatively fund a contracted wild turkey biologist position, which currently runs through September 2024. In addition, FWC's Wild Turkey Management Program (WTMP) hired an OPS Assistant Coordinator at the end of FY 2016-17 to help accomplish program objectives. Over the last year, WTMP staff and the contracted wild turkey biologist provided technical assistance to various organizations, private citizens, and the media.



## Introduction

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The public has a strong interest in wild turkey management and hunting. The Osceola subspecies, which occurs only in peninsular Florida, often draws particular interest. Because the wild turkey occupies a wide variety of habitat on private and public lands throughout Florida, it requires a comprehensive program that involves management, technical assistance, research, and data analysis. The WTMP coordinates these activities with other FWC programs, other state and federal agencies, conservation groups, private landowners, and the public. FWC uses revenues primarily from the sale of turkey permits to accomplish this work.

Established in 1986, section 379.354(8)(b), *Florida Statutes*, requires all individuals hunting wild turkeys in Florida to purchase and possess a turkey permit, in addition to their hunting license, unless exempt from license requirements. The fee for the turkey permit began at \$5. In 2003, a non-resident turkey permit was created with a \$100 fee. Turkey permit fees were raised in 2010 to \$10 for residents and \$125 for nonresidents, where they currently stand. The law stipulates that revenue generated from the sale of wild turkey permits, or that pro rata portion of any license that includes turkey hunting privileges, shall be used for the conservation, research, and management of wild turkeys or to promote the cultural heritage of hunting. FWC is authorized to expend up to 10% of permit revenues to promote hunting and sport fishing activities with an emphasis on youth participation (s. 379.354(8), F.S.).

Pursuant to requirements in section 379.354(8), *Florida Statutes*, this report documents the revenues and expenditures associated with the turkey permit fund for FY 2023-24 and summarizes activities conducted by FWC using these funds.

## Turkey Permit Revenues and Program Expenditures

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During FY 2023-24, 12,279 one-year resident turkey permits (\$10 each), 200 five-year resident turkey permits (\$50 each) and 5,953 one-year non-resident turkey permits (\$125 each) were sold. The revenues from these permit sales, plus those derived from the sale of other licenses that include turkey hunting privileges (e.g., annual sportsman's license, gold sportsman's license), totaled \$1,291,423. A portion of these revenues, \$37,481, was set aside to promote youth hunting programs in Florida (e.g., Florida Youth Hunting Program, Ocala Youth Conservation Camp, etc.). Total expenditures for conservation, research, and management were \$704,378.

## Program Activities

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The WTMP is charged with coordinating wild turkey management and research activities across the state and providing a statewide approach to conservation and management of Florida's wild turkey population. The WTMP is guided by the 10-year Strategic Plan for Wild Turkey Management (2019-2028) (<http://myfwc.com/media/1450/turkeystrategicplan.pdf>) with the goal to "Ensure healthy and sustainable wild turkey populations throughout the state while providing and promoting compatible uses of the resource." Such a broad program requires involvement of WTMP and other FWC staff in activities generally



encompassing four categories: management projects; data collection, management, and analysis; technical assistance; and research and development.

## Management Projects

With continuing changes in the quality and quantity of wild turkey habitat in different locations throughout Florida, habitat management efforts continue to be vital to FWC's objective of maintaining turkey distributions across the state. Management funded by turkey permit revenue has primarily focused on the state's 6-million-acre wildlife management area (WMA) system because of the management opportunities it presents, the recreational public use of these lands, and their associated funding needs. Management activities, such as mowing, prescribed burning, wildlife plantings, natural timberlands restoration, exotic species control and the creation of wildlife openings have enhanced habitat on these areas for wild turkeys and many other wildlife species.

Historically, this management has been accomplished through a cost-share program with the Florida Chapter of National Wild Turkey Federation (FLNWTF). In FY 2015-16, the FFS joined as a funding partner to enable the program to serve more projects. During FY 2023-24, \$357,989 was provided for 21 management projects on 16 conservation areas and four regional focal areas (see Exhibit 1). The FFS contributed \$80,000 in funding and FLNWTF contributed \$97,968. The Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida also awarded the program \$20,000 in grant funding. FWC provided \$160,021 of turkey permit funds as cost-share funding. In many cases, FWC or co-operating agencies provided equipment, personnel, or other funding for these projects. These matching contributions had a total value of \$1,476,821 resulting in a total wild turkey cost-share program value of \$1,834,810. These projects provide substantial benefits for wild turkeys and other wildlife at considerable cost savings relative to their overall value.



**Exhibit 1**

**In FY 2023-24 the Wild Turkey Cost-Share Program Helped Fund \$1.8 Million in Wildlife Management Area Projects**

Location	Project Description	FWC/FFS/NWTF Cost-share Funding	Other Co-operator Funding
Blackwater River SF	Herbicide – Pine Release	\$20,000	\$2,582
Blackwater River SF	Herbicide - Longleaf Pine Restoration	\$20,000	\$2,144
Blackwater River SF	Herbicide	\$20,000	\$1,480
Blackwater River WMA	Herbicide	\$20,000	\$3,750
Camp Blanding	Herbicide	\$22,500	\$351,462
Camp Blanding	Aerial Spheres	\$7,277	\$7,750
Choctawhatchee River WMA	Prescribed Burning	\$20,000	\$2,000
Choctawhatchee River WMA	Prescribed Burning	\$20,000	\$72,400
Econfina Creek WMA	Sand Pine Removal	\$20,000	\$52,000
GCPEP Longleaf Alliance	Prescribed Burn	\$20,000	\$599,304
Goethe SF	Mowing	\$20,000	\$8,400
KICCO WMA	Exotic Plant Control	\$20,000	\$8,333
Lake George SF	Prescribed Burn - Aerial	\$14,000	\$99,400
Lake Panasoffkee WMA	Mechanical Treatment	\$16,000	\$17,500
Matanzas SF	Herbicide and Burn	\$20,000	\$2,850
Pine Log SF	Herbicide	\$10,915	\$2,675
Point Washington SF	Herbicide	\$7,863	\$2,262
Raiford WMA	Prescribed Burn	\$19,968	\$33,500
TNC EST	SWG Central FL Burn Team	\$20,000	\$185,029
Upper Hillsborough WMA	Mowing and Mulching	\$18,000	\$19,500
Wakulla SF	Food Plots	\$1,466	\$2,500
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$357,989</b>	<b>\$1,476,821</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>			<b>\$1,834,810</b>

Note: The Wild Turkey Cost-Share Program is a partnership between the FWC, Florida Forest Service, and National Wild Turkey Federation.  
Acronyms: NF = National Forest, NP = National Preserve, NWR = National Wildlife Refuge, SF = State Forest, SP = State Park, WMA = Wildlife Management Area, NFWFMD = Northwest Florida Water Management District, SRWMD = Suwannee River Water Management District, SFWMD = South Florida Water Management District

**Data Collection, Management, and Analysis**

One role of WTMP is to monitor statewide turkey population trends. This is accomplished, in part, by conducting an annual post-season survey of spring turkey hunters. Through this process, a random sample of licensed turkey hunters is surveyed to generate statewide estimates of turkey harvest, hunter effort and hunter satisfaction. The survey method was changed in 2020 from the traditional mail survey to a telephone survey. Mail surveys often lead to overestimation of participation and harvest, while the telephone survey method is a more modern approach that provides more thorough and representative data, producing more accurate results. For the 2024 spring turkey season, 4,127 telephone interviews were conducted with licensed hunters out of a population of 183,610. Based on survey responses, an estimated 31,085 hunters pursued turkeys during the 2024 spring season. Exhibit 2 summarizes the harvest estimates derived from the survey between 1988 and 2024.



**Exhibit 2**  
**Florida Wild Turkey Harvest Estimates, 1988 - 2024**

Year	Estimated Harvest	95% Confidence Limits
1988	12,619	9,799 - 15,438
1989	14,547	12,819 - 16,275
1990	13,661	11,855 - 15,468
1991	11,397	7,766 - 15,028
1992	9,313	8,172 - 10,455
1993	9,208	7,823 - 10,594
1994	9,334	8,212 - 10,456
1995 <sup>1</sup>		-
1996	12,054	10,409 - 13,700
1997	15,833	14,874 - 16,792
1998	18,755	17,256 - 20,254
1999	17,291	15,750 - 18,832
2000 <sup>2</sup>	12,357	11,799 - 12,915
2001	11,371	10,850 - 11,885
2002	12,395	11,850 - 12,940
2003	12,407	11,802 - 13,012
2004	13,793	13,223 - 14,363
2005 <sup>3</sup>	20,046	18,819 - 21,273
2006	17,212	16,299 - 18,126
2007	19,510	18,740 - 20,280
2008	21,837	20,744 - 22,930
2009	20,687	19,764 - 21,611
2010	19,057	18,063 - 20,052
2011	18,405	17,462 - 19,348
2012	16,804	15,899 - 17,709
2013	16,377	15,339 - 17,416
2014	16,299	14,871 - 17,727
2015	16,998	15,609 - 18,387
2016	16,598	15,499 - 17,748
2017	17,846	16,580 - 19,110
2018	16,250	14,761 - 17,738
2019	13,894	12,679 - 15,108
2020 <sup>4</sup>	14,071	12,688 - 15,474
2021	13,007	11,506 - 14,507
2022	12,866	11,490 - 12,241
2023	11,382	9,937 - 12,826
2024	14,513	12,997 - 16,029

Note: This table displays the spring turkey season harvest estimates and upper and lower values from mail surveys from 1988 to 2018 with 95% confidence limits. The true harvest is within these numbers with 95% certainty.

<sup>1</sup> A mail survey was not conducted.

<sup>2</sup> The survey instrument was substantially changed; thus, the harvest estimate is not readily comparable to previous years.

<sup>3</sup> The survey was conducted through Florida State University using scan forms that resulted in data interpretation errors; the results may not be comparable to other years.

<sup>4</sup> Survey method changed from mail to telephone. To make accurate comparisons to past data it must be corrected due to overestimation of participation and harvest with the mail survey method.



During the 2024 survey, WTMP also inquired about the level of participation during the statewide youth spring turkey hunt. Based on survey responses, 2.4% of eligible turkey hunters supervised a youth during the special two-day hunt, providing the opportunity for as many as 5,917 youth hunters to participate and harvest an estimated 2,337 turkeys. Estimated participation and harvest increased from 2023 by 81% and 77%, respectively.

WTMP also collects and summarizes harvest data from WMAs with check stations. This data is used to determine area-specific hunter success rates. Harvest data and hunter success rates can, in some instances, be useful as an indicator of the status of an area’s wild turkey population and/or the quality of its turkey hunting opportunities. Exhibit 3 presents the hunter success rates for the 2024 Special-Opportunity Turkey Hunts.

**Exhibit 3  
Hunter Success Rates for the 2024 Special-Opportunity Turkey Hunts**

Wildlife Management Area	Harvest	Hunter Days	Hunter Success (hunter days/harvest)
Dexter/Mary Farms WMA	9	68	7.6
Fisheating Creek WMA	16	74	4.6
Ft. Drum WMA	10	29	2.9
Green Swamp West WMA	41	292	7.1
Homosassa WMA	2	6	3
Lake Panasoffkee WMA	6	70	11.7
Triple N Ranch WMA	19	105	5.5
<b>Overall</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>6.3<sup>1</sup></b>

Source: Data collected by FWC’s Wild Turkey Management Program.

<sup>1</sup> This number represents the total combined pressure divided by total combined harvest for all listed Wildlife Management Areas.

In addition to harvest data compiled historically from check stations and the spring hunter survey, WTMP staff analyzed harvest reports from the 2023-24 fall and spring turkey seasons. During the 2023 fall season, 353 male and 22 female turkeys were harvested. Harvest occurred in 59 out of 67 counties, with 13% of harvests on public land and 87% on private land. Eastern wild turkeys represented 39% of the reported harvests and Osceola wild turkeys represented 61% (based on county locations of harvests). For the 2024 spring turkey season, the total reported harvest was 11,037 turkeys, of which 82% were on private lands and 18% on public lands. Of the reported harvests, 26% were the Eastern subspecies, while 74% were the Osceola.

Another monitoring technique implemented by WTMP to collect data on wild turkey populations statewide is the summer brood survey. Initiated in 2019, this is a citizen-science based survey to on wild turkey productivity. A smart phone app using Survey123 and an online tool were developed for the public to report turkey sightings. This survey is conducted annually during the brood rearing season (June - August). During the 2023 brood survey, over 4,500 observations were reported from June 1 to August 31, totaling 20,595 wild turkeys reported. Results from 2023 indicate statewide metrics of 1.78 poults per hen (PPH) and 3.42 poults per brood (PPB). Though PPH declined from 2.00 in 2022, overall trends from the last five years (2019 - 2023) remain stable (Exhibit 4). Increased observations from this survey will provide staff with a better understanding of wild turkey reproduction, abundance, and distribution around the state. WTMP staff works with both internal and external partners to advertise the brood survey.



**Exhibit 4  
Summer Brood Survey Results, 2020-2023**

Year	Poults per Hen	Poults per Brood	% of Hens with a Brood	# Males per Female
2019	2.00	3.71	71.52	2.13
2020	1.88	3.58	58.77	2.70
2021	2.29	3.89	65.03	2.17
2022	2.00	3.33	64.37	2.07
<b>2023</b>	<b>1.78</b>	<b>3.42</b>	<b>57.80</b>	<b>1.95</b>

**Technical Assistance**

WTMP, other FWC personnel, and a contracted wild turkey biologist are often called upon to provide information to other agencies, various organizations, private landowners, the media, and the public concerning wild turkeys. Such assistance covers a wide range of topics including questions on wild turkey history and management, survey techniques, nuisance and crop depredation complaints, hunting information and opportunities, data collection and research issues.

**Agency Assistance.** FWC and other state agency personnel frequently request assistance from WTMP concerning turkey population surveys, turkey management on WMAs and other public hunting lands, development of funding proposals for habitat management projects, nuisance turkeys, and reported sick turkeys. During FY 2023-24, WTMP and the contracted wild turkey biologist visited numerous WMAs, state forests, national forests, and national wildlife refuges to provide input on wild turkey management or hunting regulations, or to discuss funding opportunities for management projects.

**Public Outreach.** The public frequently requests information on turkey hunting and management. FWC usually handles such requests by phone, e-mail, or regular mail service to distribute appropriate information, but occasionally requests are best addressed through personal contact and on-site visits. FWC also provided information to the public through various news releases, magazine articles, brochures, social media posts, videos, and media contacts both internally and through media outlets provided by the NWTf.

FWC works closely with the NWTf throughout the year. A 2007 Memorandum of Understanding between FWC, the NWTf and the FL NWTf provides support to continue the many mutually beneficial interests and activities of each party. The WTMP Coordinator currently serves on the Technical Committee of NWTf and serves as Technical Advisor to the FL NWTf’s Board of Directors. Some of the related activities in which FWC participated during this fiscal year included board and Super Fund committee meetings of the FL NWTf and the NWTf Technical Committee meeting.

WTMP administers a wild turkey registry program, which awards certificates to hunters harvesting an outstanding gobbler (male turkey). Depending on the area where the turkey was harvested, either an Osceola (Florida) subspecies or the Eastern subspecies Outstanding Gobbler certificate is awarded for gobblers meeting minimum standards (at least an 11-inch beard and 1 ¼-inch spurs). A certificate is also awarded for youth hunters who harvest their first gobbler to encourage these young hunters to continue hunting as they get older. Since the inception of this recognition program in 2001, 719 Outstanding Osceola, 211 Outstanding Eastern, and 596 First Gobbler certificates have been awarded. During FY 2023-24, 12 First Gobbler certificates were awarded.





## Research and Development

**Camera-Based Wild Turkey Abundance Survey Development.** FWC staff have analyzed and cataloged approximately 740,000 trail camera photos for wild turkeys. Once completed, photos of wild turkeys will be used to estimate density on the same study areas as the Wild Turkey Gobbler Harvest Rate Study to determine density effects on hunter harvest rates. The first stage of analysis is complete and additional models that include habitat/landscape covariates are near completion. Once all analyses are complete, staff will begin working on a draft manuscript.

**Wild Turkey Gobbling and Breeding Chronology.** During FY 2017-18, WTMP completed its involvement on a multi-faceted research project being conducted in coordination with FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute—Upland Game Bird Program, Tall Timbers Research Station, and the University of Florida. This project researched the use of Autonomous Recording Units to better understand nesting and gobbling chronology in relation to current hunting seasons. Female wild turkeys were captured and fitted with very high frequency radio transmitters and monitored for incubation activity and nesting success. This study occurred in north Florida and north-central Florida.

As a continuation of the North Florida Gobbling and Breeding Chronology study, fieldwork began in FY 2022-23 for a paired study obtaining breeding chronology for south Florida habitats. The first objective is to determine the relationship between gobbling activity, nesting activity, and hunting season dates in south Florida. The second objective is to determine the relationship between hunting pressure and gobbling activity. Turkeys are being tagged on Okaloacoochee Slough WMA in Hendry County and DeLuca Preserve in Osceola County, and autonomous recording units are being placed on 5 paired hunted and un hunted sites throughout south Florida. Fieldwork will continue through 2025. This project is a collaboration with FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute—Upland Game Bird Program and the University of Florida.

## Program Direction

To further expand wild turkey management efforts throughout Florida, in 2006, a contracted wild turkey biologist position was established through a partnership contract among the FWC, United States Forest Service, Florida Forest Service, and NWTF. This partnership agreement has been renewed several times over the years, most recently in FY 2019-20 to run through September 2024. The contract is intended to be renewed for another five-year term (2024-2029). This position was established to promote habitat and forest restoration work on state and national forests. NWTF has served as the employer for this position and provides the necessary funding to complete work on the ground; however, the multiple partners coordinate closely on the development of an annual work plan and provide specific oversight for accomplishment of defined activities during Steering Committee meetings held bi-annually. WTMP works to incorporate priority items identified in Florida's 10-year Strategic Plan for Wild Turkey Management into the annual work plan for the co-operative position. Foremost, this position is used to promote improved turkey habitat management on public and private lands through involvement with various workshops and by working with individual land managers on specific restoration projects. This past year, the contracted wild turkey biologist visited numerous WMAs and national forests and attended several partnership meetings to provide habitat management recommendations and restoration project guidance. Another area in which the contracted wild turkey biologist has been directed to focus is promotion of the hunting heritage, especially among youth and young hunters, to help grow the number of active hunters.



WTMP hired an OPS Assistant Coordinator in June 2017 to accomplish the mission of WTMP more fully and tasks identified in the strategic plan. This position assists the WTMP Coordinator with implementation of the statewide wild turkey management program and reviewing emerging information and concepts on wild turkey life history and management, to facilitate addressing management issues in a timely manner. This past year, the Assistant Coordinator was heavily involved in facilitating the second year of the Gobbling and Nesting Chronology research project, reviewing potential research initiatives, and analyzing the effects of current turkey hunting policies.

FWC maintains a Wild Turkey Standing Team that is comprised of WTMP staff, FWC staff from across the agency, and associate members from the NWTF. This team provides input and assistance to ongoing program activities, emerging issues, and specific tasks that are assigned as appropriate. The team's ongoing efforts are primarily guided by the priority tasks and the implementation schedule outlined in the 10-year Strategic Plan for Wild Turkey Management.

The goal of the Strategic Plan for Wild Turkey Management is to “ensure healthy and sustainable wild turkey populations throughout the state while providing and promoting compatible uses of the resource.” All efforts discussed in this report are undertaken to work toward achieving that goal. WTMP will continue to provide excellent customer service, increase positive contacts with conservation organizations, develop additional partnerships and provide quality hunting areas, all of which benefit wild turkeys and the citizens of the State of Florida

