

*Characteristics of Wild Turkey Hunters in
Mississippi & their Attitudes towards Wild
Turkey Management Issues*



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by

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Executive Summary

A mail survey was sent to 1) 689 licensed hunters in Mississippi who indicated they hunted for wild turkey in 2001-02 Mississippi hunting season; 2) a random sample of 1,105 Mississippi members of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), and 3) 592 participants in 2003 Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey (SGHS). Surveys were developed and procedures were administered by the Human Dimensions & Conservation Law Enforcement Laboratory at Mississippi State University; survey procedures were conducted between November, 2003 and January, 2004. Survey questions were developed in close consultation with the MDWFP Wild Turkey Program Coordinator and Wildlife Division administrators. There were 375, 390, and 421 hunters who returned useable questionnaires from the statewide, NWTf, and SGHS participants, respectively. The respective effective response rates were 69%, 48%, and 76% after non-deliverables were excluded. Turkey hunters were asked questions about their overall hunting activity, their hunting and turkey hunting activity in the 2002-03 hunting season, their participation in the NWTf and other conservation organizations, their satisfaction with hunting in Mississippi, and their opinions or attitudes towards four key issues: baiting, season length and framework dates, tagging and reporting turkey harvest, and implementation of a statewide fall hunting season. Additionally, hunter's willingness-to-pay to for a fall or spring stamp to hunt for wild turkey was explored. The subsequent report presents information received from the following groups of Mississippi wild turkey hunters:

STATE – Respondents to the 2002 Mississippi Hunter Survey who indicated they hunted turkeys one or more days in the 2001-02 hunting season. Responses from this group are representative of all licensed hunters (resident & non-resident) who hunted for wild turkey in the 2001-02 season with a margin of error not exceeding 5%. *With the exception of the “Willingness-to-Pay for Fall and Spring Turkey Hunting Stamps” section, information in the Executive Summary only includes results from this group* as it is the most representative of all licensed wild turkey hunters in Mississippi. Results from subsequent groups and any significant differences among them are presented in the body of the report.

NWTf - A random sample of National Wild Turkey Federation members in Mississippi. Responses from this group are representative of Mississippi NWTf members with a margin of error not exceeding 5%, but generalizing results from this group beyond

Mississippi NWTF member population who hunt should not done.

SGHS - Participants in the 2003 MDWFP Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey. Responses from this group are representative of 2003 Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey participants with a margin of error not exceeding 5%, but generalizing results from this group beyond 2003 SGHS participants should not be done.

- Because many turkey hunters in the **STATE** or **SGHS** group were also members of the National Wild Turkey Federation, all samples were combined and a separate analysis was conducted comparing NWTF **MEMBERS** and **NON-MEMBERS**. Results from these two groups are presented side by side with the three groups from which samples were obtained, but no generalizations should be made from these groups to any population. These results are presented to theoretically explore possible differences in characteristics and attitudes between NWTF members and non-members, not to make population estimates.

2003 Mississippi Wild Turkey Hunter Survey Results

Characteristics of Wild Turkey Hunters and their Hunting Participation

- Most licensed wild turkey hunters in Mississippi were white (99%) males (95%), not of Spanish/Hispanic origin (99%). About 87% were Mississippi residents. Their average age was 47 years, and their median household income was \$60,000-69,999.
- About 32% of licensed wild turkey hunters in Mississippi indicated that they were a member of the National Wild Turkey Federation. About 48% indicated they were a member of another conservation organization as well.
- Mississippi wild turkey hunters have been hunting for an average of over 33 years; they have been turkey hunting an average of nearly 16 years.
- When asked to rate the importance of hunting compared to other activities, about 83% indicated hunting was their most important activity. When asked to rate how wild turkey hunting compared to other species hunting, about 46% indicated wild turkeys were their favorite animal to hunt.
- Those who hunted in the 2002-03 season (90%) indicated they did so an average of nearly 34 days. About 27 days were spent hunting in Mississippi and 7 days were spent elsewhere.
- Spring turkey hunting in the 2003 season was relatively evenly distributed across Mississippi. About 38% of hunters indicated most of their turkey hunting was done in the central part of the state. About 36% hunted most in the southern part of the state, and about 25% hunted most in north Mississippi.

- Mississippi wild turkey hunters hunted turkeys an average of 18 days during the 2002-03 season; about 16 days were in Spring. Most spring hunting (9 days) took place on private lands in Mississippi or out-of-state (4 days). On average, slightly over 1 day each was spent hunting on MDWFP Wildlife Management Areas and other public lands in Mississippi
- On average, Mississippi wild turkey hunters harvested about 4 turkeys in the 2002-03 season; about 1 bird was taken during the spring season in Mississippi, and about 2 birds were taken out-of-state.
- When asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with their overall hunting and turkey hunting in Mississippi, over 69% indicated they “very” or “extremely satisfied” with their overall hunting experiences in Mississippi; about 65% were “very” or “extremely satisfied” with their turkey hunting in Mississippi. About 6% of hunters were “not at all satisfied” with both experiences.

Attitudes towards Tagging and Reporting Wild Turkey Harvest

- Although the TEL-CHEK harvest reporting and compliance system has been in place voluntarily for the past two turkey seasons, about 31% of licensed wild turkey hunters are still “not at all familiar” with the system; an additional 30% are only “slightly familiar.”
- With TEL-CHEK being voluntary, hunters were asked to indicate their level of support for five mandatory tagging and harvesting reporting systems. Most hunters (62%) were supportive of a mandatory tagging system that would require hunters to detach and date a tag and attach it to a bird upon harvest. About 56% of hunters were supportive of both “some type of mandatory tagging system” and “some type of mandatory harvest reporting system”. Over 53% supported making the current TEL-CHEK system mandatory, while most (60%) opposed a mandatory harvest reporting system that involved visiting a designated check station.

Attitudes towards Implementation of a Statewide Fall Hunting Season

- When asked their experiences with fall turkey hunting, most hunters (81%) indicated that they have never fall turkey hunted. Only about 9% indicated they had previously participated in fall turkey hunting in Mississippi.
- Hunters were asked to indicate their level of support for a statewide fall “either-sex” or “gobbler only” season under a restrictive season length and framework scenario. Only 36% of hunters were supportive of either option. Slightly over 40% of hunters opposed both an “either-sex” or “gobbler only” fall season. Nevertheless, about 64% of hunters indicated they would participate in a fall turkey hunting season if available.

Willingness-to-Pay for Fall and Spring Turkey Hunting Stamps

- Hunters were asked to indicate whether they would be willing to pay a specified dollar amount for a fall turkey hunting stamp (in addition to their current license fees) if a statewide fall turkey hunting season was implemented. Results of responses to 10 bid values ranging from \$2.00 to \$50.00 were used to calculate the average willingness-to-pay for such a stamp. Analysis indicated the average willingness-to-pay for a fall turkey hunting stamp was **\$10.77**. This stamp price is what 50% would pay and 50% would not.
- Similarly, hunters were asked to indicate whether they would be willing to pay a specified dollar amount for a spring turkey hunting stamp (in addition to their current license fees). Results of responses to 10 bid values ranging from \$2.00 to \$50.00 were used to calculate the average willingness-to-pay for such a stamp. Analysis indicated average willingness-to-pay for a spring turkey hunting stamp was **\$37.16**.

Attitudes towards Spring Wild Turkey Season Length and Framework

- When asked to indicate what they felt about the current length of the spring turkey hunting season in Mississippi, most (66%) felt “the season length is just right.” About 26% believe the season was “too short” and only 8% felt it was “too long.”
- Those who indicated the season length was just right were asked to indicate if any date changes from the current season framework (season starting the Saturday nearest March 20th and closing on May 1st) were acceptable substitutes. Of the five options presented, most (60%) wanted the season framework dates to remain the same. About 19% indicated they would prefer the season open and close one week earlier.
- Those who indicated the season was too short were asked to select from 5 season framework date alternatives. The highest rated alternatives all involved a two week rather than one week season extension. A plurality (32%) of hunters indicated they would prefer the season open two weeks earlier than the current date and close on May 1st. About 23% prefer it open on the same date and close two weeks later, and 22% indicated an additional week on both ends of the current framework.

Attitudes towards Baiting Wild Turkeys

- With baiting wildlife continually surfacing each year in the Mississippi Legislature, hunters were asked to indicate their level of agreement with five statements about baiting wild turkeys for the purpose of hunting. Most hunters agreed or strongly agreed that “Baiting does not give wild turkeys a fair chance” (69%); “Hunting turkeys over bait should not be considered sporting” (68%); “Baiting laws should be enforced more stringently” (68%); and “Baiting negatively influences others perception of hunting” (65%). Over 71% disagreed or strongly disagreed that “Hunting turkeys over bait should be legalized in Mississippi.”

Acknowledgments

This study would not have been possible without the efforts and cooperation of many people. Many present and former MDWFP and Human Dimensions & Conservation Law Enforcement Laboratory (HDCLEL) personnel provided direct or indirect assistance. MDWFP personnel deserving special recognition are Dene Smith for her administrative duties related to the survey, Ben Sessums and the print shop crew for producing survey instruments, Curtis Thornhill and his staff for providing license information, and Ron Seiss and James Austin for serving as liaisons between MDWFP, NWTf and Mississippi State University, and their assistance in questionnaire development. Thanks also go to National Wildlife Turkey Federation and MDWFP Wildlife Division for providing financial assistance for survey materials, mailings, return postage, and data entry. Finally, we thank Will Freeman, Erica Wells, and Mike Thrash of the HDCLEL for data processing and construction of data tables.

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Introduction

In Fall 2003, MDWFP approached the Human Dimensions & Conservation Law Enforcement Laboratory (HDCLEL) in the Forest & Wildlife Research Center (FWRC) at Mississippi State University (MSU) to conduct a follow-up study of hunters who indicated, in the 2002 Survey of Mississippi Hunters, that they hunted wild turkey during the previous hunting season. Major issues MDWFP biologists wanted to cover included baiting, season length and framework dates, tagging and reporting turkey harvest, and implementation of a statewide fall hunting season. Additionally, MDWFP wanted to know hunter's willingness-to-pay to for a fall or spring stamp to hunt for wild turkeys. Together, HDCLEL and MDWFP staff worked together to develop a set of questions that would adequately measure hunter sentiments on each these five issues.

Currently, in the absence of any mechanism to produce and exhaustive list of turkey hunters in Mississippi, respondents to the annual Survey of Mississippi Hunters who indicate they hunt for wild turkeys is the best available sampling frame for a turkey specific hunter study in Mississippi. For that survey, all hunters who indicated they hunted turkeys one or more days in the 2001-02 season (n=689) were included in this study. Because the original study was a random sample, this group, termed **STATE** during the remainder of this report, is most representative of all wild turkey hunters in Mississippi. Any generalizations one would like to make from this report about "all wild turkey hunters in Mississippi" should only be made from this group. Generalizations should always be made with caution because non-respondents may represent a completely different portion of the wild turkey hunter population than those who did.

Two other lists also became available for inclusion in the study that would help us to better understand particular segments of the turkey hunting population. First, the National Wild Turkey Federation provided their complete list of current members in Mississippi (n=6,115), and MDWFP provided a complete list of participants in the MDWFP Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey (n=592). Because of the large size of the NWTF membership, a sample of 1,105 NWTF members was randomly selected to participate in the study. For the remainder of this report, these groups are referred to as **NWTF** and **SGHS**, respectively. Any generalizations one would like to make from this report about "all Mississippi NWTF Members" or "all Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey participants" should only be made from these two groups, respectively.

Since **NWTF** and **SGHS** groups have shown behavior consistent with higher specialization hunters, i.e. club affiliation, and voluntarily participating in a management program, previous research in the area of recreational specialization (Bryan 1977; Ditton et al. 1992; Miller and Graefe 2000), would suggest these two groups would be represented along the upper end of the hunting specialization continuum. For example, they should also exhibit more days of participation and have more conservation-oriented attitudes than the typical turkey hunter in Mississippi (who only exists in research reports).

Because many turkey hunters in the **STATE** or **SGHS** group also indicated they were members of the National Wild Turkey Federation, respondents from all groups were combined and a separate analysis was conducted looking only at NWTF **MEMBERS** and **NON-**

MEMBERS. Results from these two groups are presented side by side with the three groups from which samples were obtained, but no generalizations should be made from these groups to any population. These results are presented to theoretically explore possible differences in characteristics and attitudes between NWTF members and non-members, not to make population estimates.

Objectives

There were four objectives for this study. The first was to determine participation patterns and attitudes towards four turkey management issues (baiting, season length and framework dates, tagging and reporting turkey harvest, and implementation of a statewide fall hunting season) from a representative sample of Mississippi wild turkey hunters (STATE). Second, was to determine hunter's willingness-to-pay to for a fall or spring stamp to hunt for wild turkeys from a representative sample of Mississippi wild turkey hunters (STATE). Third, was to make comparisons between STATE and representative samples of Mississippi NWTF members (NWTF), and MDWFP Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey (SGHS) participants on all variables in the study. Fourth, we wanted to investigate differences between NTWF members and non-members on all variables so that NWTF would be better able to determine how their constituency differs from potential members.

Survey Implementation

An 11-page questionnaire was developed to collect information from wild turkey hunters. Questionnaires were mailed between November, 2003 and January, 2004 to individuals in the three samples. Survey procedures were based partly on the findings of Dillman (2001) and partly on experience gained through previous data collections by the investigators (Hunt and Ditton 1996). The survey mailings were personalized to help increase the probability of response. Three mailings were sent to each participant (as necessary). Two mailings were made three weeks apart in November, 2003 (prior to Thanksgiving), and the last mailing was made immediately after the New Year's Holiday. Because timely information was needed to assist MDWFP in management plan preparation prior to February, 2004, this split mailing procedure was done to not disturb hunters during the holiday season, and to increase response. The time period between Thanksgiving and New Year's is credited as the worst possible time to conduct mail surveys (Brown et al. 1989; Dillman 2001).

Response Rates

Response rates to the survey ranged from 48% (NWTF) to 76% (SGHS). Because there were significant differences in response rates from the three groups in the study they could not be combined for purposes of reporting results and are treated separately (Table 1). The "returned non-useable" category includes those who indicated they did not hunt, were a refusal, or were reported as being deceased. When non-deliverables were excluded from consideration, an

effective response rate of 69% was achieved from the STATE group, 48% from the NWTF groups, and 76% from the SGHS group.

Table 1. Response rates to the 2003 Survey of Mississippi Wild Turkey Hunters; by group.

	STATE	NWTF	SGHS
A) # surveys mailed	689	1,105	592
B) # surveys returned useable	375	390	421
C) # surveys returned non-useable	40	88	6
D) # non-deliverable surveys	92	100	30
Effective Response Rate: (B+C / A-D)	69%	48%	76%

Results

Results are presented in table format to simplify comparisons. If either **NWTF** responses or **SGHS** results presented in a table is highlighted in **bold** then results from that group significantly differed from the **STATE** group on the item.

Under each table, interpretation of the results presented in table format is conducted in the following manner. First, results are presented for all hunters from the **STATE** group. These provide population estimates that are generalizable to the total population of wild turkey hunters in Mississippi, and are presented in single-spaced bullet statements. Second, if statistically significant results (alpha level=0.05) were found among the **STATE** group and the **NWTF** or **SGHS** group, they are noted below the population estimates presented for the **STATE** group in a “*Significant Group Differences*” section. If there is no statement describing significant differences on a particular variable, then there were no significant group differences.

Third, if the **NON-MEMBER** group results are in bold, they significantly differed from the **MEMBERS** group. If there were significant differences between members and non-members, they are explained below the table in a “*Member/Non-member differences*” section.

Demographics and Participation Patterns

This section presents information on the demographic characteristic of wild turkey hunters and their participation patterns in hunting and turkey hunting. First, hunters were asked to indicate their age, gender, household income category, their race, and whether they were of Spanish/Hispanic origin (Table 2).

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents to the 2003 Survey of Mississippi Wild Turkey Hunters; by group.

Item	Response	STATE	NWTF	SGHS	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER
Average age of respondents		47.0	44.1	47.1	46.3	46.1
Gender of respondents	MALE	95.9	92.9	99.5	96.6	95.4
	FEMALE	4.13	7.1	0.5	3.4	4.6
Race of respondents	WHITE	99.7	99.2	99.3	99.5	99.7
	OTHER	0.3	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.5
Spanish/Hispanic Origin	YES	99.7	99.7	99.5	99.4	99.2
	NO	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.8
Median Income Level		\$60 -\$70k	\$70-80k	\$70-80k	\$70-80k	\$60 -\$70k

- Most licensed wild turkey hunters in Mississippi were white (99%) males (95%), not of Spanish/Hispanic origin (99%). Their average age was 47 years, and their median household income was \$60,000-69,999.

Significant Group Differences: NWTF respondents were younger, and were comprised of slightly more females than STATE. Both NWTF and SGHS had significantly higher median household income levels than the STATE group.

Member/Non-member differences: NON-MEMBERS had a significantly lower median household income level compared to NWTF MEMBERS.

Second, hunters were then asked to indicate whether they were a member of the National Wildlife Turkey Federation, and whether they belonged to any other conservation organization. Next, they were asked to indicate how important hunting and hunting wild turkeys was compared to their other outdoor recreation activities, and other species they hunt, respectively. Finally, hunters were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with their overall hunting in Mississippi as well as their wild turkey hunting (Table 3).

Table 3. Club affiliation, importance of hunting and turkey hunting, and satisfaction with hunting and turkey hunting in Mississippi; by group.

Item	Response	STATE	NWTF	SGHS	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER
NWTF Member	YES	32.3	-	67.9	--	--
	NO	67.7		32.1		
Other conservation group member	YES	47.8	58.9	63.5	65.5	40.3
	NO	52.2	41.1	36.5	34.5	59.7

Importance of hunting compared to other outdoor activities ^a	1	83.2	82.6	89.0	87.3	81.8
	2	14.3	11.4	10.5	9.8	15.4
	3	1.4	4.1	0.5	2.1	1.6
	4	1.0	1.9	0.0	0.8	1.3
Importance of turkey hunting compared to hunting other game species ^b	1	46.5	50.3	72.4	63.4	44.6
	2	36.7	36.8	22.5	28.1	37.8
	3	13.0	8.5	4.1	5.8	13.4
	4	3.8	4.4	1.0	2.4	4.2
How satisfied are you with hunting (overall) in Mississippi	Not at all	2.1	0.8	0.5	1.1	0.8
	Slightly	4.0	1.4	1.2	1.1	4.4
	Moderately	24.7	24.0	15.0	21.4	20.0
	Very	58.8	52.8	54.9	54.2	52.1
	Extremely	16.4	21.0	28.4	22.3	22.8
How satisfied are you with turkey hunting in Mississippi	Not at all	1.9	1.1	0.5	0.8	1.6
	Slightly	4.9	2.3	1.7	2.2	4.2
	Moderately	28.3	27.5	15.8	22.4	25.5
	Very	46.9	49.7	51.0	51.3	45.1
	Extremely	18.0	19.4	31.0	23.4	23.7

^a 1=most important; 2=second most important; 3=third most important; 4=none of the above.

^b 1=favorite animal to hunt; 2=second favorite; 3=third favorite; 4=none of the above

- About 32% of licensed wild turkey hunters in Mississippi indicated that they were a member of the National Wild Turkey Federation. About 48% indicated they were a member of another conservation organization as well. When asked to rate the importance of hunting compared to other activities, about 83% indicated hunting was their most important activity. When asked to rate how wild turkey hunting compared to other species hunting, about 46% indicated wild turkeys were their favorite animal to hunt. When asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with their overall hunting and turkey hunting in Mississippi, over 69% indicated they “very” or “extremely satisfied” with their overall hunting experiences in Mississippi; about 65% were “very” or “extremely satisfied” with their turkey hunting in Mississippi. About 6% of hunters were “not at all satisfied” with both experiences.

Significant Group Differences: NWTF respondents were significantly more likely to participate in a conservation or organization than STATE respondents; they were also less likely to be “not at all satisfied” and more likely to be “extremely satisfied” with their overall hunting experiences in Mississippi. SGHS respondents were significantly different than STATE respondents on all variables in Table 3. Specifically, they were nearly twice as likely to belong to the National Wild Turkey Federation, and to belong to another conservation organization. Also, they were more likely than both STATE and NWTF to rate hunting as their most important outdoor activity, and to indicate that wild turkeys were their favorite animal to hunt. SGHS respondents also were most likely to be “very” or “extremely satisfied” with both hunting and turkey hunting in Mississippi.

Member/Non-member differences: **NON-MEMBERS** were significantly less likely to belong to a conservation organization. They also were less likely to rate hunting as their most important outdoor activity, and wild turkey as their favorite animal to hunt.

Third, hunters were asked to indicate how many years they had been hunting overall, and for wild turkeys. Additionally they were asked how many days they fall and spring turkey hunted in the 2002-03 season in various land types, where they did most of their 2003 spring turkey hunting in Mississippi, and how many turkeys they harvested throughout the season in Mississippi and elsewhere (Table 4).

Table 4. Hunting and turkey hunting participation patterns of respondents; by group.

Item	Response	STATE	NWTF	SGHS	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER
Average years hunting		33.4	30.4	35.6	33.7	32.4
Average years turkey hunting		15.7	15.0	19.8	18.0	15.4
Average days hunted during 2002-03 season	In Mississippi	26.7	38.8	40.8	38.3	31.5
	Out-of-State	7.4	3.8	4.1	5.6	3.6
	Total	34.1	42.6	44.9	43.9	35.1
Average days fall turkey hunting during 2002-03 season	In Mississippi	1.2	0.8	0.5	0.7	1.0
	Out-of-State	0.8	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.3
	Total	1.9	1.0	0.6	1.0	1.3
Average days spring turkey hunting during 2002-03 season	MDWFP WMA	1.1	1.7	1.6	1.4	1.7
	Other MS Public	1.2	1.3	1.7	1.6	1.2
	MS Private Lands	9.3	12.6	14.9	13.8	10.0
	Out-of-State	3.9	1.6	2.4	2.9	1.8
	Total	15.6	17.3	20.6	19.7	14.7
What part of state do you do most of your spring turkey hunting	North	25.2	28.2	26.5	27.0	25.3
	Central	38.4	50.1	53.0	49.1	45.2
	South	36.4	21.6	20.5	23.9	29.5
Average turkey harvest in the 2002-03 season	Mississippi (Fall 02)	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.2
	Out-of-state (Fall 02)	0.9	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.4
	Mississippi (Spring 03)	1.0	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.0
	Out-of-state (Spring 03)	1.8	1.4	1.7	1.7	1.3
	Total	3.9	3.3	3.6	4.0	2.9

- Mississippi wild turkey hunters have been hunting for an average of over 33 years; they have been turkey hunting an average of nearly 16 years. They spent an average of nearly 34 days hunting overall in the 2002-03 season. About 27 days were spent hunting in Mississippi and 7 days were spent elsewhere. Turkey hunting in 2002-03 was relatively evenly distributed across Mississippi. About 38% of hunters indicated most of their turkey hunting was done in the central part of the state. About 36% hunted most in the southern part of the state, and about 25% hunted most in north Mississippi.

Mississippi wild turkey hunters hunted turkeys an average of 18 days during the 2002-03 season; about 16 days were in Spring. Most of the spring hunting (9 days) took place on private lands in Mississippi or out-of-state (4 days). On average, only slightly over 1 day each was spent hunting on MDWFP Wildlife Management Areas or other public lands in Mississippi. On average, Mississippi wild turkey hunters harvested about 4 turkeys in the 2002-03 season; about 1 bird was taken during the spring season in Mississippi, and about 2 birds were taken out-of-state.

Significant Group Differences: NWTF respondents had fewer years of overall hunting experience than both STATE and SGHS, however, they were more likely than STATE to hunt more days in Mississippi, and overall in the 2002-03 season. STATE respondents hunted significantly more days than both NWTF and SGHS respondents out-of-state during that season. Both NWTF and SGHS respondents spring turkey hunted more days on private lands in Mississippi than STATE respondents, however, they both participate fewer days out-of-state spring turkey hunting in the 2002-03 spring season. More SGHS and NWTF respondents indicated that they did most of their spring turkey hunting in 2003 in the central part of the state (between Highways 84 & 82) than did STATE respondents; STATE respondents tended to hunt significantly more in south Mississippi (south of Highway 84). Both SGHS and NWTF respondents were likely than STATE respondents to harvest one or more turkeys in the 2003 spring season.

Member/Non-member differences: MEMBERS have hunted wild turkeys significantly more years than NON-MEMBERS, and also hunted significantly more days overall and for wild turkeys in the 2002-03 season. MEMBERS were also more likely to harvest a wild turkey in the 2003 spring season

Attitudes towards Tagging and Reporting Wild Turkey Harvest

The inability to enforce bag limits on wild turkeys is constantly expressed by MDWFP conservation officers and hunters alike (Austin 2004). A physical tag to complement the TEL-CHEK system would provide CO's a tool for enforcing the bag limit. After asking hunters how familiar they were with the current TEL-CHEK harvest reporting and compliance system, hunters were asked whether they supported the idea of mandatory harvest reporting and tagging systems, and two more specific systems involving physical tagging birds, and transporting birds to designated check stations located throughout each county (Table 5).

Table 5. Attitudes towards tagging and reporting wild turkey harvest by respondents to the 2003 Survey of Mississippi Wild Turkey Hunters; by group.

Item	Response	STATE	NWTF	SGHS	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER
How familiar are you with the TEL-CHEK system?	Not at all familiar	30.9	20.9	5.5	18.0	19.0
	Slightly familiar	30.0	30.9	30.6	29.2	33.7
	Somewhat familiar	30.3	32.2	40.0	34.3	34.2
	Very familiar	8.7	16.0	23.9	18.5	13.1
Making the TEL-CHEK harvest reporting system mandatory	Strongly oppose	11.3	13.5	11.9	12.3	12.1
	Oppose	19.3	18.5	13.6	16.8	16.8
	Neutral	26.2	28.9	21.6	25.3	25.8
	Support	30.4	22.2	28.6	25.9	29.0
	Strongly support	12.7	16.9	24.5	19.8	16.3
A mandatory harvest reporting system that would require turkey hunters to transport their harvest to designated check stations throughout each county	Strongly oppose	35.5	35.7	31.7	32.8	37.0
	Oppose	33.6	29.8	28.5	28.7	33.1
	Neutral	13.2	16.3	16.1	15.8	14.6
	Support	9.1	9.3	11.9	11.4	8.2
	Strongly support	8.5	9.0	11.9	11.4	7.1
A mandatory tagging system that would require hunters to detach and date a tag from their license immediately upon harvesting a turkey and physically attaching it to the bird prior to transport	Strongly oppose	12.6	14.9	10.2	12.4	12.9
	Oppose	17.3	12.4	11.1	10.9	17.7
	Neutral	20.0	20.5	16.5	18.6	20.1
	Support	30.0	26.7	31.5	29.8	28.0
	Strongly support	20.1	25.6	30.8	28.3	21.4
Some type of mandatory tagging system for turkeys in Mississippi	Strongly oppose	10.2	11.24	8.8	9.32	11.6
	Oppose	15.2	13.2	10.2	11.35	14.8
	Neutral	19.3	20.5	14.4	17.8	18.3
	Support	36.1	29.8	37.5	34.1	34.7
	Strongly support	19.3	25.3	29.2	27.4	20.6
Some type of mandatory harvest reporting system for turkeys in Mississippi	Strongly oppose	8.5	9.6	6.6	8.0	8.7
	Oppose	12.7	10.7	7.8	9.1	11.87
	Neutral	22.6	24.2	17.6	21.3	21.1
	Support	39.9	32.6	39.0	36.0	39.3
	Strongly support	16.3	23.0	29.0	25.6	19.0

- Although the TEL-CHEK harvest reporting and compliance system has been in place voluntarily for the past two turkey seasons, about 31% of licensed wild turkey hunters are still “not at all familiar” with the system; an additional 30% are only “slightly familiar.” With TEL-CHEK being voluntary, hunters were asked to indicate their level of support for five mandatory tagging and harvesting reporting systems. Most hunters (62%) were supportive of a mandatory tagging system that would require hunters to detach and date a tag and attach it to a bird upon harvest. About 56% of hunters were supportive of both “some type of mandatory tagging system” and “some type of mandatory harvest reporting system”. Over 53% supported making the current TEL-CHEK system mandatory, while most (60%) opposed a mandatory harvest reporting system that involved visiting a designated check station.

Significant Group Differences: NWTF respondents were significantly more likely than STATE respondents to be at least “slightly familiar” with the TEL-CHEK harvest reporting system. However, they were significantly less familiar with it than the SGHS respondents. All groups were not very supportive of a mandatory harvest system which requires visiting a check station, nevertheless, SGHS respondents were significantly more supportive than both NWTF and STATE on each other mandatory harvesting reporting, or tagging system.

Member/Non-member differences: None.

Attitudes towards Implementation of a Statewide Fall Hunting Season

Some hunters have told the MDWFP that they would like the agency to investigate the possibilities of a fall turkey hunting season. Currently, fall turkey hunting only occurs in portions of 7 counties along the Mississippi River. After hunters were asked to indicate their experience with fall turkey hunting in Mississippi and elsewhere, they were asked to indicate their level of support for a fall “either-sex” or “gobbler only” season under a restrictive season. Specifically, to ensure harvest would be within acceptable levels, hunters were faced with the following potential season regulations: 1) it would be a 1 to 2 week private lands only season set to open after the peak of squirrel season and before deer gun season, 2) weapons would be limited to archery and shotguns, 3) the MDWFP would regulate bag limits, and 4) turkey populations would be monitored closely and MDWFP would decide each year which counties had enough turkeys to support a Fall hunting season. After rating support for the two alternatives, hunters were asked whether they would participate in a fall season if it were available to them (Table 6).

Table 6. Attitudes towards implementation of a statewide fall hunting season by respondents to the 2003 Survey of Mississippi Wild Turkey Hunters; by group.

Item	Response	STATE	NWTF	SGHS	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER
Fall turkey hunting experience	Never	81.0	89.1	83.9	84.0	85.6
	In Mississippi only	5.9	4.5	7.1	5.4	6.9
	In Mississippi and elsewhere	3.4	1.4	3.7	3.3	2.1
	Out-of-state only	9.8	5.0	5.4	7.3	5.3
Support for implementing fall either-sex turkey hunting season in Mississippi	Strongly oppose	23.7	30.8	37.9	33.3	26.7
	Oppose	19.2	17.1	18.8	18.9	17.4
	Neutral	21.6	16.5	13.1	15.0	20.4
	Support	18.3	19.7	14.8	17.8	17.4
	Strongly support	17.1	16.0	15.4	15.0	18.2

Support for implementing fall gobbler only turkey hunting season in Mississippi	Strongly oppose	19.0	23.1	30.8	25.5	23.35
	Oppose	20.8	18.3	19.2	19.4	19.8
	Neutral	23.7	25.7	19.0	22.8	22.3
	Support	24.9	17.1	18.0	18.3	22.5
	Strongly support	11.7	15.7	13.0	14.1	12.1
Would you participate in a fall turkey hunting season if implemented in Mississippi?	YES	63.8	67.4	62.4	64.0	65.3
	NO	36.2	32.6	37.6	36.0	34.7

- When asked their experiences with fall turkey hunting, most hunters (81%) indicated that they have never fall turkey hunted. Only about 9% indicated they had previously participated in fall turkey hunting in Mississippi. Hunters were asked to indicate their level of support for a statewide fall “either-sex” or “gobbler only” season under a restrictive season length and framework scenario. Only 36% of hunters were supportive of either option. Slightly over 40% of hunters opposed both a “either-sex” or “gobbler only” fall season. Nevertheless, about 64% of hunters indicated they would participate in a fall turkey hunting season if available.

Significant Group Differences: NWTF respondents were least likely to have ever participated in a fall turkey hunting season. SGHS respondents showed significantly more opposition than both the STATE or NTWF respondents to implement either a “gobbler only” or “either-sex” season.

Member/Non-member differences: NON-MEMBERS were significantly less likely than MEMBERS to oppose a fall “either-sex” season, although a plurality (44%) of non-members opposed or strongly opposed the possible season.

Attitudes towards Spring Wild Turkey Season Length and Framework

By law, the spring turkey season in Mississippi opens on the Saturday closest to March 20th and ends May 1st. Some hunters have told MDWFP that the season is too short while others say it is too long. After asking hunters what they felt about the current season (too short, too long, or just right), hunters were asked to rate alternative lengths based on their current perception of the season’s length (Table 7).

As a separate issue, some hunters have expressed to MDWFP their desire to hunt wild turkeys the same number of days each spring. The current framework results in the season length fluctuating from 40-46 days, depending on the year. Hunters were asked to indicate whether they would prefer the season open and close on the same date each year, start on the same date but close after a set number of days, or to keep the status quo (Table 7).

Table 7. Attitudes towards spring wild turkey season length and framework dates by respondents to the 2003 Survey of Mississippi Wild Turkey Hunters; by group.

Item	Response	STATE	NWTF	SGHS	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER
Current belief about the current spring turkey season length in Mississippi	Too short	25.8	27.5	26.8	26.6	27.3
	Too long	7.7	6.4	5.4	6.6	6.0
	Just right	66.6	66.2	67.8	66.8	66.7
For those who felt season was too short, rate preferred alternative season	Saturday closest to March 13 – May 1	16.5	17.0	30.3	23.4	20.0
	Saturday closest to March 6 – May 1	31.9	31.9	30.3	29.2	34.0
	Saturday closest to March 20 – May 8	6.6	4.3	4.6	5.7	4.0
	Saturday closest to March 20 – May 15	23.1	23.4	14.7	20.8	19.0
	Saturday closest to March 13 – May 8	22.0	23.4	20.2	20.8	23.0
For those who felt season was too long, rate preferred alternative season	Saturday closest to March 27 – May 1	8.0	20.0	5.0	15.9	0.00
	Saturday closest to Apr 3 – May 1	44.0	20.0	20.0	27.3	35.0
	Saturday closest to March 20 – Apr 24	28.0	20.0	50.0	34.1	25.0
	Saturday closest to March 20 – Apr 17	12.0	20.0	20.0	11.4	30.0
	Saturday closest to March 27 – Apr 24	8.0	20.0	5.0	11.4	10.0
For those who felt season was just right, rate possible date changes while keeping same length	Saturday closest to March 13 – Apr 24	19.5	18.3	24.4	22.9	16.8
	Saturday closest to March 6 – Apr 17	7.5	8.2	5.2	5.5	9.24
	Saturday closest to March 27 – May 8	8.4	8.2	9.2	8.7	8.4
	Saturday closest to Apr 3 – May 15	4.2	4.1	1.1	2.6	4.2
	Season dates stay the same	60.2	61.2	60.2	60.3	61.3
Attitude towards changing spring turkey season framework in Mississippi	Prefer season open/close on same date each year	27.3	20.3	25.6	23.6	26.0
	Prefer season open on a Saturday and close after a set number of days	29.2	29.9	27.3	29.2	27.8
	Prefer current spring framework stay the way it is now	43.5	49.9	47.1	47.2	46.2

- When asked to indicate what they felt about the current length of the spring turkey hunting season in Mississippi, most (66%) felt “the season length is just right.” About 26% believe the season was “too short” and only 8% felt it was “too long.” Those who indicated the season length was just right were asked to indicate if any date changes from the current season framework (season starting the Saturday nearest March 20th and closing on May 1st) were acceptable substitutes. Of the five options presented, most (60%) wanted the season framework dates to remain the same. About 19% indicated they would prefer the season open and close one week earlier. Those who indicated the season was too short were asked to select from 5 season framework date alternatives. The highest rated alternatives all involved a two week rather than one week season extension. A plurality (32%) of hunters indicated they would prefer the season open two weeks earlier than the current date and close on May 1st. About 23% prefer it open on the same date and close two weeks later, and 22% indicated an additional week on both ends of the current framework. With regard to framework dates, a plurality (44%) preferred the current spring framework.

Significant Group Differences: None

Member/Non-member differences: None

Willingness-to-pay for Fall or Spring Wild Turkey Hunting Stamps

This section presents information on turkey hunter's willingness-to-pay for a stamp for the continued opportunity to hunt wild turkey in Mississippi. In addition to contributing additional monies to turkey management programs in Mississippi, a stamp would also allow MDWFP and university researchers to have a known sampling frame for all licensed wild turkey hunters in Mississippi. Currently, as is the case with this survey, a costly screening survey, i.e., the Mississippi Hunter Survey, must be conducted to identify turkey hunters in the state. Turkey hunters were asked to indicate whether they would be willing to pay a specified bid for a stamp to hunt (or continue to hunt) for wild turkeys in the Fall in Mississippi, or to continue to hunt for wild turkeys in the Spring in Mississippi. For each type of stamp, one bid value was randomly selected from a set of ten bid values (\$2, \$3, \$4, \$6, \$9, \$13, \$19, \$27, \$39, or \$50) and presented to each hunter. The range of bid values was the same for both questions, but individuals did not receive the same dollar amount for both questions. To determine the median bid value (or bid value that 50% of the hunters would accept or reject, respectively), we modeled the probability of a "yes" response to the presented bid using logistic regression. The median bid value is considered the average willingness-to-pay for the stamp. The initial analysis for both WTP for both the Fall or Spring Turkey Hunting Permit indicated none of the five groups in this study (**STATE, NWTF, SGHS, MEMBER, or NON-MEMBER**) statistically differed in their response to presented bids, so all respondents to the study were combined to complete the analysis.

WTP – Fall Wild Turkey Hunting Permit

To conduct the logistic regression and compute the median willingness-to-pay, the logistic regression model makes the researcher specify other variables in the study that are expected to affect a hunter's willingness-to-pay a specified bid. For the Fall permit analyses, we hypothesized that 12 variables might affect a hunter's willingness-to-pay for the Fall permit: 1) years turkey hunting, 2) satisfaction with turkey hunting, 3) days fall turkey hunting in the previous year, 4) total days hunting turkey in the previous year, 5) total days hunting overall, 6) how turkey hunting rated in importance to other species, 7) how hunting rated in importance to other activities, 8) support for a fall either sex-season, 9) support for a gobbler only fall season, 10) whether they would participate if a fall season was implemented, 11) income level, and 12) the bid value presented to hunters.

Only five variables (#8 - #12) were found to significantly affect willingness-to-pay the specified bid. Specifically, the probability of accepting the bid increased as 1) support for either fall season increased, 2) as income level increased, and 3) likelihood of participating in a fall season increased, and decreased as 4) bid value increased. After re-running the logistic regression

model with only the significant variables, final coefficients and mean scores for each variable were obtained and entered into the logistic regression equation to determine willingness-to-pay. Final computations indicated that the median bid value, or willingness-to-pay for a Fall wild turkey hunting permit in Mississippi was **\$10.77**.

WTP – Spring Wild Turkey Hunting Permit

For the spring permit analyses, we hypothesized that 10 variables might affect a hunter’s willingness-to-pay for the permit: 1) years turkey hunting, 2) satisfaction with turkey hunting, 3) days spring turkey hunting in the previous year, 4) total days hunting turkey in the previous year, 5) total days hunting overall, 6), how hunting rated in importance to other activities 7) how turkey hunting rated in importance to other species, 8) current belief about the length of spring season, 9) income level, and 10) the bid value presented to hunters.

Only four variables (#2, #7, #9 and #10) were found to significantly affect willingness-to-pay the specified bid. Specifically, the probability of accepting the bid increased as 1) satisfaction with turkey hunting in Mississippi increased, 2) as income level increased, and decreased as 3) species preference for turkey decreased, and 4) bid value increased. After re-running the logistic regression model with only the significant variables, final coefficients and mean scores for each significant variable were obtained and entered into the logistic regression equation to determine willingness-to-pay. Final computations indicated that the median bid value, or WTP for a spring wild turkey hunting permit in Mississippi was **\$37.16**.

Attitudes towards Baiting Wild Turkeys

With baiting wildlife continually surfacing each year in the Mississippi Legislature, hunters were asked to indicate their level of agreement with five statements about baiting wild turkeys for the purpose of hunting.

Table 8. Attitudes towards baiting wild turkeys by respondents to the 2003 Survey of Mississippi Wild Turkey Hunters; by group.

Item	Response	STATE	NWTF	SGHS	MEMBER	NON-MEMBER
Baiting does not give wild turkeys a fair chance	Strongly disagree	4.6	4.4	1.4	3.1	4.2
	Disagree	12.2	11.3	4.1	8.3	10.4
	Neutral	14.6	11.6	7.9	9.7	13.8
	Agree	25.5	26.0	21.9	24.3	23.8
	Strongly agree	43.1	46.7	64.7	54.7	47.8

Baiting laws should be enforced more stringently	Strongly disagree	4.1	4.7	2.4	3.5	4.2
	Disagree	7.4	9.2	4.4	6.6	7.1
	Neutral	20.5	10.1	13.1	17.2	17.1
	Agree	26.8	24.4	23.1	23.6	26.5
	Strongly agree	41.3	43.6	57.0	49.1	45.1
Hunting turkeys over bait should be legalized in Mississippi	Strongly disagree	48.9	56.4	74.0	63.5	55.0
	Disagree	22.4	16.2	14.3	15.9	20.3
	Neutral	16.1	15.4	7.0	11.8	14.2
	Agree	7.4	5.9	2.4	4.6	5.8
	Strongly agree	5.2	6.1	2.2	4.2	4.7
Baiting negatively influences other's perception of turkey hunting	Strongly disagree	6.4	3.9	3.2	3.4	6.2
	Disagree	7.5	8.4	3.4	6.5	5.6
	Neutral	21.2	17.9	9.1	14.4	17.7
	Agree	30.0	31.7	29.9	30.8	30.5
	Strongly agree	34.8	38.1	54.4	44.9	40.1
Hunting turkeys over bait should not be considered sporting	Strongly disagree	8.4	5.0	5.1	4.7	9.1
	Disagree	11.4	10.4	5.1	7.9	10.4
	Neutral	12.0	10.4	6.6	8.8	11.0
	Agree	23.9	24.4	18.7	22.1	22.2
	Strongly agree	44.3	49.9	64.5	56.7	47.3

- Most hunters agreed or strongly agreed that “Baiting does not give wild turkeys a fair chance” (69%); “Hunting turkeys over bait should not be considered sporting” (68%); “Baiting laws should be enforced more stringently” (68%); and “Baiting negatively influences others perception of hunting” (65%). Over 71% disagreed or strongly disagreed that “Hunting turkeys over bait should be legalized in Mississippi”

Significant Group Differences: NWTF respondents were significantly more likely than STATE respondents to agree that “hunting turkeys over bait should not be considered sporting”. SGHS respondents significantly differed from STATE on all statements. They were significantly more likely than both STATE and NWTF respondents to agree that “baiting does not give wild turkeys a fair chance,” “baiting laws should be enforced more stringently,” and “baiting negatively influences other’s perception of hunting.” SGHS showed the strongest disagreement with the statement that “Hunting turkeys over bait should be legalized in Mississippi.” They were significantly more likely than STATE respondents to agree with the statement that “hunting turkeys over bait should not be considered sporting”.

Member/Non-member differences: MEMBERS were significantly more likely than NON-MEMBERS to agree with all statements except one; MEMBERS were significantly more likely to disagree with the statement that “Hunting turkeys over bait should be legalized in Mississippi.”

Discussion

- Although many of the differences observed among the statewide population of turkey hunters (STATE), National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) members, and Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey (SGHS) participants were small, and some may argue trivial or managerially insignificant, these groups should continue to be sampled separately for survey research purposes. Despite small differences, they are still statistically significant ones and errors eventually will be made if one tries to generalize results of NWTF or SGHS groups to “all wild turkey hunters in Mississippi.”
- The effect of nonresponse bias on survey results needs continual investigation. About 5% of NWTF respondents told us they “were not a hunter.” Because the analysis focused on those who hunted in the previous season (or wanted to but couldn’t), NWTF should consider conducting a general membership survey to determine the true percentage of hunters and non-hunters in their organization, and the issues and viewpoints among the latter group. With nonresponse for this group so high (52%), it is likely that there may be even more members who don’t hunt and for which this survey was not a salient one. Additionally, nonresponse was evident to a lesser extent in the STATE group. More hunters who were a member of a conservation organization in the original statewide survey responded to this survey (48% v. 28%), so generalizations made from the STATE group should also be made with caution. As the analysis of MEMBERS and NON-MEMBERS showed, significant differences can exist between those who do and do not belong to conservation organizations. From previous research into nonresponse bias, those who do not may hunt fewer days and be less successful than those who do, and this may affect their attitudes as well.
- With all the press releases that have been conducted statewide about the TEL-CHEK harvest reporting and compliance system, it is troubling that over 60% of hunters still are not at all or only slightly familiar with it. It appears even more information needs to be provided to hunters, perhaps in non-traditional outlets, to help get the word out. Still, the voluntary nature of the system does not force hunters to learn about it. Until TEL-CHEK becomes mandatory (if ever) we may expect hunters to continue to be apathetic towards learning the system. In the absence of TEL-CHEK becoming mandatory, there was solid support from turkey hunters for a tagging system that may help complement information received from TEL-CHEK participants.
- Most wild turkey hunters in Mississippi do not fall turkey hunt, nor do they appear to want to. Whereas a fall turkey hunting season would increase hunting opportunity (one of MDWFP Wildlife Division’s primary goals) hunters, despite indicating they would participate if presented with a fall season, might question the wisdom of such a decision. It is interesting that the SGHS group (probably the highest specialized group in this study) showed the greatest opposition to a fall turkey hunting season. Perhaps there are still many questions that need answering among hunters on how implementation of a fall season would affect their spring turkey hunting success.

- If turkey hunting stamps were required of hunters to fall or spring turkey hunt, they would be willing-to-pay an average of \$10.77 and \$37.16, respectively. This average willingness-to-pay is the price 50% of current hunters would pay (in addition to their other license fees) to hunt in either season. It is assumed the remaining 50% would not continue hunting if these were the final cost of stamps. With participation rates in hunting and turkey hunting continually declining throughout the United States (with resultant loss in revenues), the last thing MDWFP wants is to make hunting more prohibitive. A further cost-benefit analysis that maximizes dollars for enhanced management while minimizing turkey hunter attrition should be conducted before any fall or spring turkey hunting stamp is proposed to the MDWFP Commission and Mississippi Legislature.
- Whereas there is some support for a season that starts and ends on the same date and maximizes spring hunting days, most wild turkey hunters like the status quo when it comes to the current spring framework. Whereas many may not oppose the opportunity to hunt more days for turkey each spring, we would expect some opposition in this regard as well as to the season possibly opening on a weekday most years. MDWFP should continue to stress to hunters the benefits of a set season maximizing hunting opportunity (for youth and adult) if they want to successfully change the current framework.
- Solid opposition to baiting wild turkeys for the purpose of hunting continues among turkey hunters. With the Mississippi Legislature continually looking at the baiting issue, primarily from a deer hunting perspective, turkey hunters and NWTF need to make it clear to decision-makers that any proposal for baiting in Mississippi that doesn't address the negative biological impacts to wild turkeys and social impacts to turkey hunting is unacceptable to Mississippi wild turkey hunters.

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