



ROBERT BROOKS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 60TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Hearing Testimony

Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage

Wednesday, December 15, 2021

11:00 A.M.

Wisconsin State Capitol, North Hearing Room

Chairman Pronchinske and members of the Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage, thank you for affording me with the opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 671.

Assembly Bill 671 would require the Department of Natural Resources to modify administrative rules relating to the hunting of wild turkeys, combine hunting zones and seasons, and modify the youth hunting restrictions. Each of the aforementioned would simplify the process, enhance the hunting experience, and exponentially increase both participation and access.

As denoted, simplifying regulations with regards to the state's turkey hunting season and zones will provide greater opportunities for public access. Under the current system, there are fewer demands for later season tags, which are typically issued on a first come, first serve basis.

The department of natural resources shall modify department administrative rules relating to the open season for hunting wild turkeys to combine the six hunting periods into two periods. The first period shall be for two consecutive weeks and shall be open for hunting wild turkeys only by individuals issued wild turkey hunting licenses and authorizations under the cumulative preference system.

For the second period, the Department of Natural Resources shall issue wild turkey hunting licenses and authorizations to applicants in the order in which applicants are received and regardless of any points accumulated under the cumulative preference system.

The Department of Natural Resources shall modify department administrative rules relating to wild turkey hunting zones to create a southern zone, to consist of current zones 1 to 3, and a northern zone, to consist of current zones 4 to 7.

The Department of Natural Resources shall modify department administrative rules relating to the youth turkey hunt to provide that a youth who does not successfully harvest a turkey



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during the youth hunt may use his or her harvest authorization in the same hunting zone during both hunting periods that follow the youth hunt.

Turkey hunting regulations in this state are beyond confusing and need to be revised. This common sense piece of legislation streamlines the process for hunting wild turkeys and provides Wisconsinites with a longer hunting season. Perhaps more important, however, the bill is a first-rate tool for recruiting new hunters.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

2021 Spring Turkey Hunting Guide

Spring Turkey Drawing

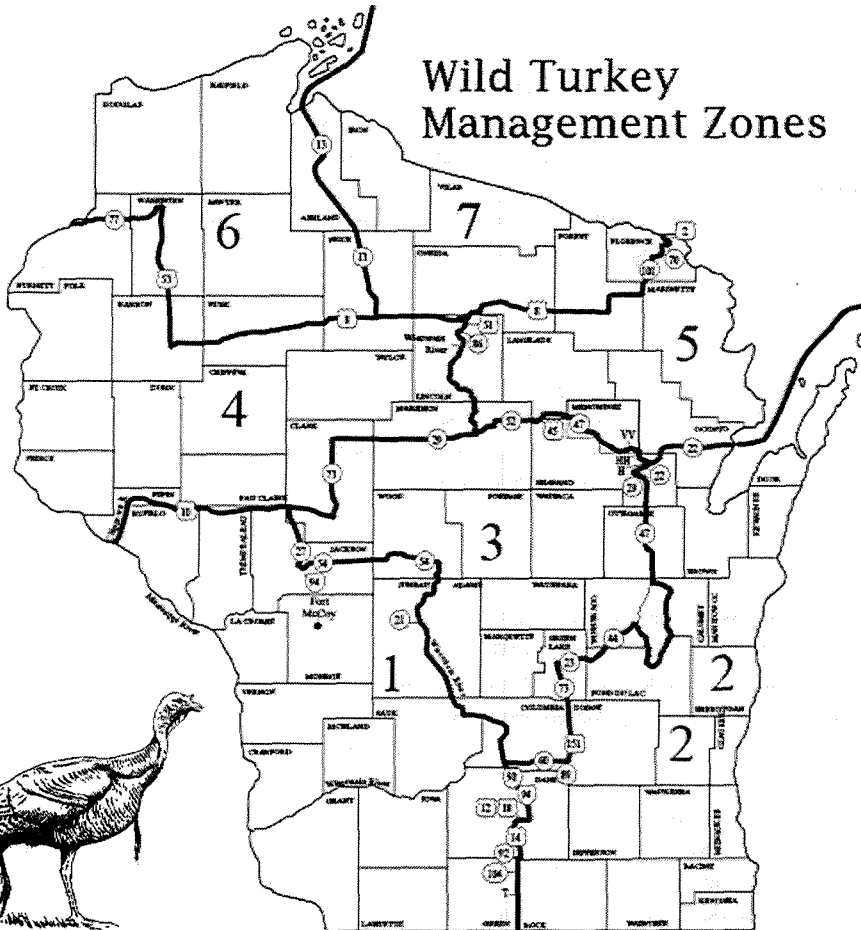
Spring turkey harvest authorizations are issued through a preference-based drawing system. Applicants are strongly encouraged to read and follow all instructions for the spring turkey application. Harvest authorizations are issued by evaluating every combination of zones and time periods the applicant would accept. Applicants can choose 2 time period and zone combinations, along with one zone in which they will accept any time period if the first two choices are unavailable. A harvest authorization can only be issued if that time period and zone is listed on the application. For the greatest chance of receiving a harvest authorization through the preference drawing, applicants should diversify their options by listing all time periods and zones they would be willing to accept.

All options of all applicants are evaluated to issue one harvest authorization to as many applicants as possible. A maximum of one turkey harvest authorization per applicant can be awarded. Remaining harvest authorizations will be sold over-the-counter after the drawing is complete. Under no circumstances can a harvest authorization be exchanged for a different time period or zone. Please refer to the [Turkey Hunting Frequently Asked Questions](#) to learn more about the turkey drawing and preference point systems.

Bonus Harvest Authorizations

After the preference drawing is complete, all remaining turkey harvest authorizations, now called bonus harvest authorizations, will be sold over-the-counter. Bonus harvest authorizations will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. Each zone will have a designated sales date. The first zone will go on sale March 15. Hunters may buy leftover harvest authorizations on a one-per-day basis until they are sold out, or the season is over. For more information, go to dnr.wi.gov, search key word "turkey."

Wild Turkey Management Zones



2021 Season Dates

- Youth Hunt – April 17 - 18
- A — April 21 - 27
- B — April 28 - May 4
- C — May 5- 11
- D — May 12- 18
- E — May 19- 25
- F — May 26- June 1

Hunting Regulations

The 2021 Spring Turkey season information can be found in the [Combined Hunting Regulations](#).

Spring Turkey Applications

Deadline: December 10, 2020
Applications are \$3 and available at gowild.wi.gov or any [license agent](#).

Hunting in State Parks

Spring turkey [hunting in state parks](#) is allowed during the 2-day Youth Turkey Hunt and the first two time periods of the regular season.

Hunting at Fort McCoy

Fort McCoy conducts its own spring turkey hunt, independent of the state season. Call 608-388-3337 for a hunting application.

DNR Call Center

1-888-WDNRINFo
1-888-936-7463



101 S Webster St.
P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

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2020 Spring Turkey Harvest

2020 Spring Turkey Harvest Authorizations (previously known as permits/tags)							2021 Harvest Authorizations
Zone	Quota Available	Issued in Drawing	Sold Over the Counter	Total Issued	Tags Acquired	Hunter Success	Authorization Levels***
1	74,646	33,897	30,206	64,103	11,691	18.2%	74,646
2	51,036	33,552	17,484	51,036	10,943	21.4%	51,036
3	63,018	27,595	25,608	53,203	11,270	21.2%	63,018
4	34,968	19,535	14,795	34,330	6,986	20.3%	34,968
5	12,000	8,175	3,826	12,001	2,183	18.2%	12,000
6	5,400	5,232	170	5,402	1,132	21.0%	5,400
7	3,900	3,575	326	3,901	633	16.2%	3,900
Ft. McCoy	476	476	0	476	144	30.3%	

*Total harvest authorizations issued and bird harvest numbers include turkeys harvested during the two-day Youth Hunt and Learn-to-Hunt events.

**Hunter success rates are not corrected for non-participation.

*** finalized levels for harvest authorizations subject to change following the turkey advisory committee meeting

The number of available harvest authorizations is set to allow maximum recreational opportunities while limiting the impact on the turkey population and minimizing hunter interference. Harvest authorizations levels reflect the amount of turkey habitat, turkey population densities and distribution in each zone. The number of authorizations available for the spring hunting season will be higher than the fall season.

2021 Spring Turkey Hunting Opportunities

Youth Hunt—April 17-18

Wisconsin's annual Spring Turkey Youth Hunt is designed to give young hunters the opportunity to hunt and gain valuable experience without competing against adults. The youth hunt is open to resident and non-resident hunters under age 16 who possess a valid spring turkey license, stamp, and harvest authorization. Youth hunters must be accompanied by an adult age 18 or older. All youth hunters must have successfully completed Hunter Education unless they are participating under the Mentored Hunting Program. Youth hunters can use a harvest authorization for any time period, but they are limited to the turkey management zone for which their authorization was issued. All other spring turkey hunting regulations apply. For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search for "spring turkey youth hunt" or call the DNR Call Center.

Mentored Hunting Program

The Mentored Hunting Program allows hunters, born on or after January 1, 1973, to obtain a hunting license and harvest authorization without first completing Hunter Education. The hunter must be accompanied by a licensed hunter, hunt within arm's reach of their mentor and comply with all of the requirements under the Mentored Hunting Program. This one-on-one mentoring opportunity gives first-time hunters a chance to try hunting and enables veteran hunters to pass on their passion for the outdoors and help keep Wisconsin's hunting heritage strong. For additional information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search for "mentored hunting," or call the DNR Call Center.

Learn to Hunt

The Learn to Hunt Program is an educational opportunity outside of the normal hunting season, designed to help inexperienced hunters of all ages have a high-quality, safe, and rewarding first-time hunting experience under the guidance of qualified Hunter Education instructors and hunting mentors. Participants will receive both classroom and field instruction prior to hunting. All participants will be paired with a qualified mentor to provide the highest level of instruction and safety. Many Learn to Hunt events are sponsored by local conservation clubs and organizations under the supervision of the DNR. For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search for "learn to hunt," or call the DNR Call Center.

Disabled Hunting Opportunities

Wisconsin provides a variety of hunting, fishing, and recreational use permits designed to help people with disabilities enjoy the state's natural resources. Turkey hunters with a Class A, B, or C disabled hunting permit may apply for the Wild Turkey Hunt for People with Disabilities using Forms 2300-271 and 2300-271A. Applications are only valid on designated private land. Applications must be fully completed and submitted by **December 10th**. Any hunter that applies for a disabled hunt on private land may not apply for a harvest authorization through the regular spring turkey drawing. For more information, visit dnr.wi.gov and search for "disabled turkey hunting," or call the DNR Call Center.



Fall 2021 Wild Turkey Hunting Zones



2021 Fall Season Dates:

- Zone 1-5: September 18– January 9, 2022
- Zone 6&7: September 18 – November 29

Using dogs to hunt wild turkeys is legal statewide during the fall season.

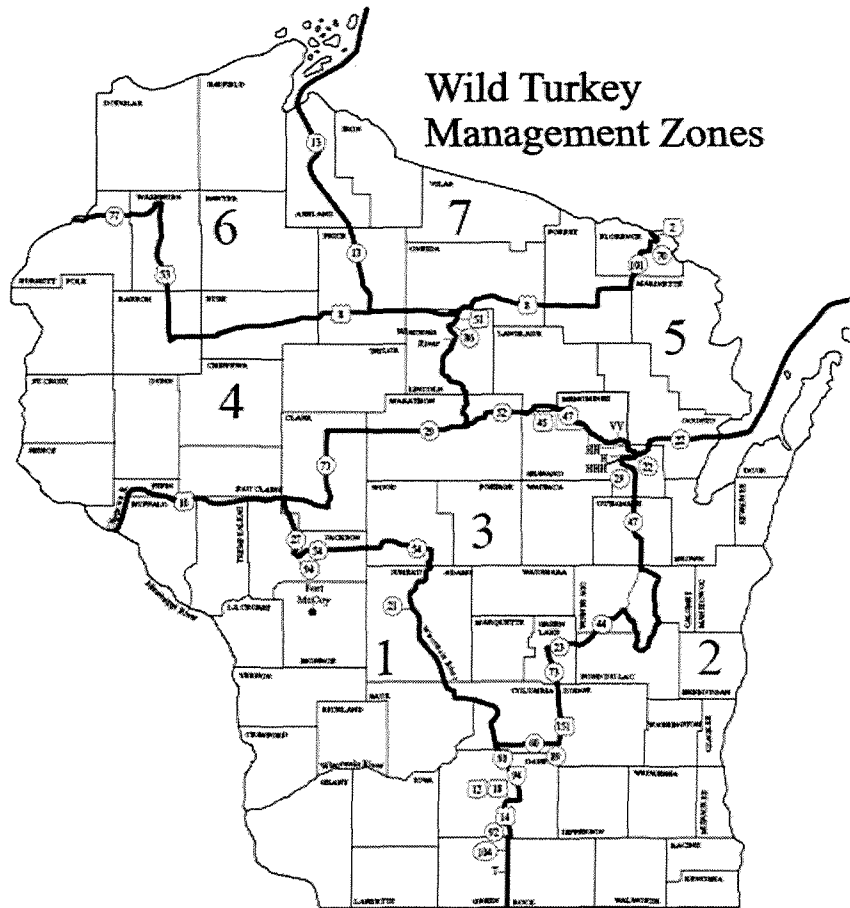
Information for the fall 2021 season:

Each fall turkey license or conservation patron license includes a fall turkey harvest authorization, the fall turkey drawing was waived in 2018. Hunters must choose the zone for which their harvest authorization will be valid at the time of purchase.

Bonus harvest authorizations (formerly known as leftover tags) will be available for purchase on August 14th, 2021. The amount available in each zone is listed in the table below. Bonus harvest authorizations may be purchased in person at any [licensing agent](#), or online at gowild.wi.gov. Bonus harvest authorizations will be issued on a one per-day basis.

Harvest authorization levels are set to allow the maximum recreational opportunities without impacting the turkey population. These levels reflect the amount of hunting pressure, along with turkey habitat, population densities and distribution in each zone. The number of harvest authorizations for the fall season will be lower than the number for the spring season.

The Fort McCoy fall turkey hunt is conducted separately from that of the State of Wisconsin turkey hunting zones. Hunting information can be found under "Recreation Opportunities" at www.mccoy.army.mil, or by calling the Permit Sales Offices at (608) 388-3337.



2020 Fall Turkey Harvest Authorizations

2020 Fall Turkey Harvest Authorizations							2021
Zone	Authorizations Issued with License Purchase	Bonus Authorizations Available	Sold Over-the-Counter	Total Issued	Birds Harvested	Hunter Success	Bonus Harvest
1	16,268	5,000	914	17,182	684	4.0%	5,000
2	22,441	2,000	2,000	24,441	1,486	6.1%	2,000
3	15,529	5,000	1,203	16,732	1,105	6.6%	5,000
4	10,213	2,000	845	11,058	596	5.4%	2,000
5	4,982	0	0	4,982	236	4.7%	0
6	4,107	0	0	4,107	307	7.5%	0
7	3,044	0	0	3,044	167	5.5%	0
Ft. McCoy	164	0	0	164	22	13.4%	NA
Total	76,748	14,000	4,962	81,710	4,600	5.6%	14,000



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Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage

2021 Assembly Bill 671

Administrative Rules Relating to Hunting Wild Turkeys

December 15, 2021

Good morning Chair Pronschinske and members of the Committee. My name is Eric Lobner, Director of the Bureau of Wildlife Management for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Joining me today to assist with questions is Scott Karel, Regulation Policy Specialist. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Assembly Bill 671 (AB 671), related to administrative rules relating to hunting wild turkeys.

The current turkey season framework is very popular with our state's spring turkey hunters. Each year, the department sends out a survey to 10,000 random spring turkey permit holders in proportion by zone. This survey is consistently the most represented snapshot of turkey hunters in the state. Responses from our 2016 spring turkey hunters survey indicated that 71% of respondents felt that maintaining the system of 6-week time periods is important in maintaining a quality spring turkey hunting experience with only 14% disagreeing. That same survey also showed that 75.5% of spring turkey hunters were satisfied with the current spring turkey season framework with only 13.4% disagreeing.

Current turkey hunting zones were established based on habitat availability, landownership patterns, turkey density, hunter success rates, and input from local biologists. These zones allow us to fine tune the number of harvest authorizations given out to minimize hunter interference and maintain hunter success and satisfaction. This new format will not allow for precise control of harvest authorization issuance and hunter densities. Since there will be fewer time periods, larger zones, and likely the same number of turkey hunters, there will be more crowding of all turkey hunters, but especially those that hunt on public lands. Under the structure in the proposed bill, the department will likely have to offer fewer harvest authorizations to prevent overcrowding and hunter safety issues.

Turkeys are the only game bird in Wisconsin that are harvested during their breeding season. Therefore, it is necessary to be more conservative with our harvest timing and structure during the spring season. Wisconsin's current turkey season framework equally distributes hunter harvest and pressure across time and space to prevent overharvest that can lead to less breeding and a drop in turkey productivity and population. Recent brood survey data has shown a consistent increase in the number of turkey broods observed, indicating our current season framework allows for good natural reproduction.

Recent studies in southeastern states have shown that decreasing turkey populations and productivity may be due to liberal, open, and continuous seasons where hunters can go afield at any point during a month-long season. A recent study in South Carolina showed that under an open continuous season framework, almost 75% of all hunting activity occurred in the first two weeks of the season. This leads to overcrowding of public lands, decreased hunter satisfaction, and increased safety incidents. In the 2021 Wisconsin spring turkey hunter questionnaire respondents ranked "Not seeing other hunters" as

having higher importance when measuring their hunting experience over “Harvesting a turkey” or “Harvesting a mature Tom.”

The hunting pressure and harvest also impact turkey breeding behavior. Turkeys have a complex social structure where more dominant males hold the best strutting and breeding locations. Studies have shown that gobbling behavior is decreased in the presence of high hunter numbers, which could potentially depress normal breeding activities and negatively impact population productivity. On a local scale, in a heavily hunted area, especially in the beginning of the season, hunting activity will be heavily skewed towards the beginning of the two proposed periods when impacts to breeding behavior could be the most detrimental. Hearing turkeys gobble is also one of the factors that influences hunter satisfaction, so reduced gobbling activity resulting from turkeys over-pressured during a short time frame may also decrease hunter satisfaction.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

WILSON

AB 671 – Spring Turkey Season

I'm here today to speak in opposition to Assembly Bill 671 and I ask that it not go forward from this committee.

Per the DNR 2020 Spring Turkey Hunting Questionnaire, 82.7% of turkey hunters hunt on private land which makes sense since 85% of Wisconsin is privately owned. In Zone 2 where I most frequently hunt, 83.3% of hunters are on private land and 70% of those hunt land they do not own. These hunters must establish a good working relationship with landowners. I personally hunt several private lands and have worked hard to build a relationship with the owners several of which have evolved into friendships.

Under the current season structure each hunter is assigned one of six seasons. This makes it easy for the landowner to grant access to multiple hunters and still limit the number on their property at any one point in time. Most importantly, the decision as to when we can hunt has already been made. The proposed reduction to two seasons will result in the landowners having to decide who hunts and who doesn't or deal with multiple hunters on his lands at the same time. Two of my landowners do not allow deer gun hunting for this very reason and indicated they would close their lands to turkey hunting if this bill becomes law. They simply do not need the aggravation. Others expressed concern for the same reasons. As these lands are closed, the result will be more pressure on the limited public lands in southern Wisconsin.

For me the quality of the hunt is a primary factor and is based upon not competing with a lot of other hunters and avoiding the safety concerns on crowded hunting grounds. Similarly, in the same 2020 DNR questionnaire, hunters rated "Not seeing other hunters" nearly as high as "Killing a turkey". Only 25% of those surveyed rated the quality of their hunt as "Fairly low" or "Very low" and overall satisfaction of 6.9 out of 10. Since most hunters want to hunt the beginning of the season, I'm concerned that the proposed reduction to two seasons and two zones will result in crowding and conflicts on prime areas. Our quest for a quality hunt will suffer as will hunter retention and recruitment.

From an access, quality, and safety standpoint AB 671 is simply a bad idea.