

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS

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Ontario Conservation Centre

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December 20, 2021

Public Input Coordinator
NDMNRF - FWPB - Wildlife Section
300 Water Street
5th floor, North Tower
Peterborough, ON
K9J 3C7

Dear Sir or Madam:

Subject: ERO # 019-4567 Proposal to establish new fall wild turkey hunting seasons in Wildlife Management Units 60, 63, 69, 70, 74, 75 and 86

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest, non-profit, fish and wildlife conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 725 member clubs. We have reviewed the proposal to open fall wild turkey hunting seasons in wildlife management units (WMU) 60, 63, 69, 70, 74, 75 and 86, and fully support it.

The OFAH has been a partner in the reintroduction of wild turkeys since the 1980s and continues to be a strong advocate for maximizing turkey hunting opportunities. The opening of more fall seasons is a conservation success story as it shows how well reintroduction of wild turkeys has worked in Ontario. The opening of these seasons has also shown the importance of a robust hunter reporting system. As specified in the *Wild Turkey Management Plan for Ontario*, new fall seasons are considered once spring hunter harvest data indicates that there are either 200 birds harvested in the spring season for three consecutive years (or three of the last four years), or that there are 0.4 turkeys harvest per square kilometer of turkey habitat for three years. All the WMUs in this proposal were below the 200-bird threshold until the changes to the hunter reporting system took effect in 2019. Since those changes were brought in and more education about reporting has been broadcast, harvest estimates in these WMUs have shot up above 200-birds. Despite this obviously being an effect of a higher proportion of hunters reporting their harvest (rather than a population increase), we credit the NDMNRF for waiting until the 200-bird number was met for three consecutive years. While we always want to ensure opportunities are granted as soon as they are available, there must be confidence in the sustainability of the population prior to opening a season.

While the multitude of new fall seasons highlights how well reintroduction efforts have gone, we have moved into a new era of wild turkey management in the province. We have very clearly established populations of wild turkeys that are robust enough to support spring and fall seasons, and these populations are expanding out of areas where initial reintroductions took place. However, we have lost the ability to easily establish new spring seasons in WMUs where these turkey populations are becoming established. As per the management plan, spring seasons can be opened if there is a minimum estimated population of 200 birds based on observations and if there is an increasing number of reports of turkeys through the deer harvest survey. With the new hunter reporting system, we should be able to get robust data that could feed into the opening of new spring seasons; however, the turkey observation question has been dropped from the deer harvest survey. This has effectively removed the only method of opening spring seasons. The management plan is now over 14 years old and no longer fits the province's needs when it comes to managing our turkey populations. The OFAH would like to see the NDMNRF reinstate a turkey observation question on the big game harvest surveys to provide a method for opening spring seasons. Additionally, the entire management plan should be reviewed and updated to reflect the current wild turkey situation and include: the changes to mandatory reporting, updates to the population objectives, the landscape changes in terms of turkey habitat, current conservation efforts such as ALUS, and updates to the indices associated with opening and closing seasons. The OFAH would like the opportunity to work with the NDMNRF to update the *Wild Turkey Management Plan for Ontario*.

In conclusion, we fully support the proposed fall hunting seasons in WMUs 60, 63, 69, 70, 74, 75 and 86 and look forward to continuing the discussion of wild turkey management in Ontario.

Yours in Conservation,



Lauren Tonelli
Resource Management Specialist

LT/jb

cc: OFAH Board of Directors
Angelo Lombardo, OFAH Executive Director
Matt DeMille, OFAH Director, Policy & Programs
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