

SOUTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wild Turkey Working Group Report

Chair, Zak Danks

Meeting of July 27-28, 2021

Held via Microsoft Teams due to COVID19 travel restrictions

(recording to be made available)

Meeting Convened: 9:30 am, Tuesday July 27, 2021

Chaired by: Zak Danks, KY Dept. of Fish & Wildlife Resources

Working Group Members Attending:

Steven Mitchell – Alabama	Adam Butler – Mississippi
Steve Barnett – Alabama	Chris Kreh – North Carolina
Jeremy Wood – Arkansas	Eric Suttles – Oklahoma
Buddy Welch – Florida	Charles Ruth – South Carolina
Hannah Plumpton – Florida	Jay Cantrell – South Carolina
Emily Rushton – Georgia	Roger Shields – Tennessee
Zak Danks – Kentucky	Jason Hardin – Texas
Cody Cedotal – Louisiana	Katie Martin – Virginia
Reina Tyl – Missouri	Mike Peters – West Virginia

Scheduled Discussion Items: (provide bulleted list with brief annotation about nature of each discussion)

- *Partner Presentations* – The Tuesday morning session consisted of presentations by two partner entities.

Mr. Mark Hatfield provided an operational update for the National Wild Turkey Federation. NWTF has a new branding effort and is challenging state chapters, staff, and partners to a revenue sharing goal of \$3 million in the coming year to fund habitat work, research, and hunting heritage activities. Superfund will reopen September 1, 2021. A partnership with Mossy Oak will fund research with a RFP planned for this fall. Banquets and events are operating at about 60% of normal levels. National convention will resume in person in February 2022 in Nashville, TN. Mark mentioned ongoing planning for the National Wild Turkey Symposium to be held in June 2022 in Asheville, NC. Also, NWTF is planning to reform the Turkey Hunting Safety Task Force with multiple meetings planned over the next year.

Dr. Nicole Nemeth provided an update for the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Lab at the University of Georgia. She gave an overview of SCWDS diagnostic cases over the past year, noting the prevalence of avian pox (22% of turkey carcass submissions) including several presenting clinical symptoms and coinfections with other diseases. Lymphoproliferative Disease virus (LPDV) and Reticuloendotheliosis virus (REV) continue to be detected in many submissions. High LPDV prevalence in wild turkeys prompted an experimental inoculation trial using domestic turkeys led by Dr. Chloe Goodwin. Preliminary results showed success in inducing LPDV infection by various routes, and that viral DNA was detected in blood, secretions, and other tissues. Student Kayla Guinn Adcock is working on a study comparing LPDV and REV. In Dr. Melanie Kunkel's West Nile virus challenge study, no wild turkeys showed signs of disease and developed antibodies. Some birds showed lesions in the brain and other organs but their importance is currently unknown.

- *Research Presentations* – Research updates from recently completed and ongoing projects by regional universities occupied the rest of the Tuesday morning session. The disease theme was continued directly and indirectly in two of the talks: “Parasite and Disease Aspects Associated with Wild Turkey Declines in Tennessee” (Horton & Gerhold) and “How Supplemental Feeding of Turkey Can Affect Turkeys” (Huang et al.). Other topics included “Multi-scale Assessment of Wild Turkey Ecology in North Carolina” (Moscicki et al.), “Resource Selection of Eastern Wild Turkey Broods” (Cohen et al.), and “Evaluating the Effect of Hurricane Laura on the Habitat Use and Movements of Eastern Wild Turkeys (Argabright et al.). The excellent presentations led to productive discussion among presenters, WG members, and other attendees. Abstracts of research presentations will be included in the meeting proceedings.
- *State Status Reports* – Representatives from each of the 15 member states provided reports on the status of wild turkey populations and management activities occurring in their respective states. Written state reports will be included in the meeting proceedings.

Other Discussion Items: (provide bulleted list with brief annotation about nature of each discussion)

- *Charge from WRC* – The Wildlife Resources Committee directed the Wild Turkey Working Group to prepare a synthesis of recently completed, ongoing, and planned research projects related to Eastern Wild Turkeys, specifically those projects directed towards determining proximate causes of decline in turkey populations. WRC Liaison Brad Carner and WRC Chair Billy Dukes explained the charge. Brad suggested the document contain a listing of studies by topic for each state. Billy requested a draft by September 7th to allow the WRC time to review before submitting to the SEAFWA Directors by their deadline of October 1st. WTWG chair Zak Danks and Roger Shields agreed to work with the incoming chair to compile and edit the document after input for each state by members.
- *Co-Chair Position* – Zak Danks continued discussion begun at the 2020 meeting about an amendment to the WTWG Operational Guidelines. The purpose is to

formally appoint a Co-Chair to serve a 1-year term. While the Chair runs the annual WTWG meeting, the Co-Chair takes notes, compiles the meeting proceedings, and presents WTWG business to the WRC at the annual SEAFWA meeting as needed. A corollary change would be to make the Chair a 1-year position as well. Charles Ruth motioned to propose an amendment of WTWG Operational Guidelines as discussed to the WRC. Cody Cedotal seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote. The amended OG document will be presented to the WRC for their consideration (see attached document with proposed changes highlighted).

- **New Chair Election** – The working group nominated Jeremy Wood (AR) to serve as chair effective upon confirmation by the WRC.
- **Multi-State Grant Opportunity / Cooperative Research Efforts** – The WTWG has discussed possibilities for cooperatively funded research in recent years. Roger Shields (TN) suggested population-level impacts of disease (a general understanding of the regional disease landscape) as a possible area of research. He mentioned the Multistate Conservation Grant Program administered by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies as potential funding source we could pursue. The group generally agreed with the idea and MCGP specifically. Roger agreed to run point for continued discussion of the issue.
- **Turkeys For Tomorrow** – Zak discussed his communications with Ron Jolly, one of several founding members of [Turkeys For Tomorrow](#), a recently formed nonprofit. Other WTWG members mentioned having spoken to Mr. Jolly or others connected with the group. We have been told that TFT is interested in funding research to better understand wild turkey decline in the Southeast, and that they want to work with the WTWG to pursue priority research topics. WTWG members see the obvious value in TFT's goal but reasoned that time will tell how the group eventually begins to operate.
- **2022 WTWG meeting** – Our next WTWG meeting will be an abbreviated meeting held in conjunction with the National Wild Turkey Symposium scheduled for June 6-9, 2021 at or near the Renaissance Hotel in Ashville, North Carolina.
- **2023 WTWG meeting** – Oklahoma will host the next full, in-person meeting but no specific data has been set.

Action Items and Recommendations:

WRC Charge – Past chair Zak Danks will work with the Chair-elect and other members to produce a draft document for WRC review by September 7, 2021.

Working Group Recommendation for Chair: Jeremy Wood, Turkey Program Coordinator, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

Meeting Adjourned: 4:19 pm Eastern Time, Wednesday July 28, 2021.

List of Current Working Group Members and Contact Information:

State	Member	Position	Email	Phone
AL	Steven Mitchell	Upland Game Bird Coordinator (turkey, quail, grouse)	Steven.Mitchell@dcnr.alabama.gov	O: (334) 242-0476 C: (256) 299-0530
AL	Steve Barnett	Assistant Biologist, Wild Turkey Program	Steve.Barnett@dcnr.alabama.gov	O: 251-626-5474 C: 251-331-9891
AR	Jeremy Wood	Turkey Program Coordinator	Jeremy.Wood@agfc.ar.gov	O: 501-223-6318 C: 501-251-7801
FL	Buddy Welch	Wild Turkey Management Program Coordinator	Buddy.Welch@MyFWC.com	O: 850-354-7986 C: 850-510-7586
FL	Hannah Plumpton	Assistant Turkey Program Coordinator	Hannah.Plumpton@MyFWC.com	O: 352-620-7730 C: NA
GA	Emily Rushton	Wild Turkey Program Coordinator	Emily.Rushton@dnr.ga.gov	O: 706-557-3264 C: 678-544-2335
KY	Zak Danks	Turkey & Grouse Program Coordinator	Zak.Danks@ky.gov	O: 502-892-4544 C: 502-330-6213
LA	Cody Cedotal	Small Game / Wild Turkey Program Manager	CCedotal@wlf.la.gov	O: 225-765-2361 C: NA
MO	Reina Tyl	Wild Turkey and Ruffed Grouse Program Leader	Reina.Tyl@mdc.mo.gov	O: 573-815-7901 ext. 2901 C: NA
MS	Adam Butler	Wild Turkey Program Coordinator	Adam.Butler@wfp.ms.gov	O: 601-432-2079 C: 601-695-6795
NC	Chris Kreh	Upland Game Bird Biologist - grouse, quail, turkey	Chris.Kreh@ncwildlife.org	O: 336-386-0892 C: 336-618-5749
OK	Eric Suttles	Senior Biologist	Eric.Suttles@odwc.ok.gov	O: NA C: 580-320-3173
SC	Charles Ruth	Big Game Program Coordinator	RuthC@dnr.sc.gov	O: 803-734-8738 C: NA
SC	Jay Cantrell	Assistant Big Game Program Coordinator	CantrellJ@dnr.sc.gov	O: 803-734-0239 C: 803-942-0859
TN	Roger Shields	Wild Turkey Program Coordinator	Roger.Shields@tn.gov	O: 615-781-6619 C: 615-598-7865
TX	Jason Hardin	Wild Turkey Program Leader	Jason.Hardin@tpwd.texas.gov	O: 512-934-8306 C: NA
VA	Katie Martin	Deer, Bear, Turkey Biologist	katie.martin@dwr.virginia.gov	O: 434-392-9645 C: 540-416-3282
WV	Mike Peters	Game Bird and Small Game Project Leader	Michael.L.Peters@wv.gov	O: 304-825-6787 C: NA

List of Other Participants (Microsoft Teams Meeting Attendance List)

Adam Butler, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
Amy Silvano, Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries
Annie Farrell, National Wild Turkey Federation
Bobbi Carpenter, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Brad Carner, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Bradley Cohen, Tennessee Technological University
Bret Collier, Louisiana State University
Buddy Welch, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Byron R. Buckley, Louisiana State University
Caleb Hinton, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
Chad M. Argabright, Louisiana State University
Charles Ruth, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Christopher D. Kreh, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
Christopher E. Moorman, North Carolina State University
Cody Cedotal, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Cully McCurdy, National Wild Turkey Federation
Dallas Harrell, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
David J. Moscicki, North Carolina State University
Derek Alkire, National Wild Turkey Federation
Doug Little, National Wild Turkey Federation
Emily Rushton, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Eric Suttles, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
Evin Stanford, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
Hannah Plumpton, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Jason Hardin, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Jay Cantrell, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Jeremy Everitts, National Wild Turkey Federation
Jeremy Wood, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Joy Sweaney, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
Katie Martin, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
Kevin Lynch, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Krishna Pacifici, North Carolina State University
Laura Horton, University of Tennessee
Lindsey Phillips, University of Tennessee
Luke Lewis, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Mark G. Ruder, Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, University of Georgia
Mark Hatfield, National Wild Turkey Federation
Mark McConnell, Mississippi State University
Michael L. Peters, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
Michael Yabsley, Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, University of Georgia
Mike Chamberlain, University of Georgia
Mike Dye, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

Miranda Huang, Mississippi State University
Nathan Blount, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
Nicholas W. Bakner, University of Georgia
Nicole M. Nemeth, Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, University of Georgia
Patrick Wightman, University of Georgia
Reina Tyl, Missouri Department of Conservation
Richard W. Gerhold, Jr., University of Tennessee
Ricky Lackey, National Wild Turkey Federation
Roger Shields, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
Rupert H. Medford, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
Sara A. Watkins, University of Georgia
Stan Priest, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
Steve Barnett, Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries
Steven Mitchell, Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries
Tabitha Lavacot, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
Wesley W. Boone, IV, North Carolina State University
Zak Danks, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources

Submitted by: Zak Danks, KY Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources