

*Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Wildlife Management Division*

**2010 Spring Turkey Season Public Meetings
Aug. 25, 2009**

Summary

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On Aug. 25, 11 public meetings were held around the state. The meetings were advertised in a variety of media around the state. A total of 146 people attended the meetings, along with 79 AGFC employees and one Commissioner (Table 1). Attendance was nearly double that of last year’s meetings, most probably due to controversial issues on the agenda **This report is based entirely on email summaries supplied by the Wildlife Management Division regional staff the day following the hearings and from actual comment sheets turned in at or after those meetings.**

The Wildlife Management Division specifically requested comments on four issues at these meetings, although any comments on turkey issues were also welcomed at the meetings. Those four issues included:

1. Support for the current conservative season of 23 days.
2. Support of the current season opening date.
3. Support for a proposal to re-zone current Turkey Zone 17
4. Support for a closure of all fall turkey seasons.

In addition, a great variety of opinions and recommendations were received from the public. An attempt will be made to capture as many of those opinions as possible below, but some “lumping” has been done to streamline this document. Keep in mind, an individual comment may have been captured in the tallies below more than once; i.e., a speaker could have made a specific comment, and he could have also made that same comment on the written form.

Table 1. Attendance by location for 2010 Spring Turkey Season Public Meeting, Aug. 25, 2009.

	R-1	R-2	R-3	R-4	R-5	R-6	R-7	R-8	R-9	R10	LR	TOT
Location*	J	B	M	C	H	MI	FS	R	CR	F	LR	
Public Attendance	5	3	20	9	4	26	11	13	8	16	21	146
AGFC Attendance	11	5	7	10	10	5	6	3	9	4	9	79
Commissioners		1										1
Speakers	4	1	12	9?	1	7	11	8	4	?	10	67+
Comment Forms	4	0	9	4	1	1	8	2	5	11	9	54

* - J = Jonesboro; B = Brinkley; M = Monticello; C = Camden; H = Hope; MI – Mt. Ida; FS = Fort Smith; R = Russellville; CR = Calico Rock; F = Fayetteville and LR = Little Rock.

Speaker Comments: At least 67 speakers addressed the crowd and AGFC at the public meetings, covering various topics. Some were for current conservative spring seasons, some were against and some were neutral or spoke on other subjects. An attempt has been made to capture their comments below, starting with the most common statements and proceeding to less common statements. The location where the comment was made is also noted.

The most common item voiced by speakers was support for a Monday opener (20 speakers; 7 LR, 5 CR, 5 M, 2 FS and 1 MI). In a show of hands in LR, at least 18 of 21 present supported a Monday opener. Next, speakers supported a shorter regular turkey season; 2 weeks seemed to be the most common suggestion for that shorter season (16 speakers; 5 M, 5 FS, 4 C, 1 FS and 1 CR). Those against the proposal to re-zone Turkey Zone 17 were in third place in number of comments (13 speakers; 5 R, 3 C, 2 M, 2 LR and 1 F). Speakers in favor of an earlier opening date were the fourth most common (12 speakers; 6 LR, 4 M, 1 C and 1 R). Eleven speakers were against closing fall seasons (8 R, 1 C, 1 M and 1 J). The use of late season prescribed fire drew attention from numerous speakers with 9 opposed to this practice (4 R, 3 FS, 1 LR and 1 MI). Two topics were covered by eight speakers: liberalization of predator regulations, along with bounties or education (3 M, 2 LR, 1 C, 1 R and 1 F) and eliminating feeding/baiting (6 R and 2 M). At least 5 topics were covered by seven speakers: approval for current conservative seasons (4 R, 1 M, 1 CR and 1 F); support for closing fall seasons (2 LR, 2 M, 2 C and 1 CR); support for a one bird spring limit (3 M, 2 FS, 1 C and 1 LR); support for a no-jakes rule, except for youth hunters (4 FS, 2 M and 1 LR) and support for a season opener later than the current opener (7 FS). Six speakers supported a later youth hunt, some suggesting going directly into the regular season on the following Monday (5 R and 2 C) and six speakers supported the current 3-week season (5 R and 1 LR). Five speakers brought note of the fact that turkey numbers are down and/or hunting is poor (4 M and 1 CR). Four speakers were for half-day hunting (2 LR, 1 M and 1 MI), possibly closing White Rock WMA to turkey hunting (4 FS), and four speakers supported the second Saturday of April as an opening date (4 R). Three speakers wanted AGFC to re-stock turkeys (3 LR). Two speakers were against reducing the current 2 bird bag limit in spring (1 M and 1 C), spoke of the poor job of management by the Commission and/or turkey biologist (1 LR and 1 M), supported the current pre-season youth turkey hunt (1 C and 1 MI), were against the use of turkey decoys on WMAs (2 FS), suggested selling turkey tags to reduce hunter numbers and generate revenue (2 FS), supported a gobblers-only fall season (2 FS) and supported more research on wild turkeys (2 LR). The number of topics with only one speaker was quite large and included speakers against the new tele-check system (J), those with no opinion on fall seasons (J), support of expanded mobility impaired opportunities (M), commended Enforcement for their efforts (M), mentioned wide-spread enforcement issues (M), opposed the present season (M), suggested more habitat projects (M), felt there was not a problem with gobbler numbers (M), suggested a reduced spring bag limit on some WMAs (M), felt that feral hogs were a problem (M), cited youth hunt abuses (M), mentioned poor turkey reproduction (M), suggested that spring seasons be closed (M), felt that corn feeders were a problem (C), had questions about the brood survey (MI), suggested a one gobbler limit for the first week of the season (MI), had questions about the effect of last winter's ice storms (MI), asked for turkeys to be re-stocked on White Rock WMA (FS), asked for the Wedington WMA youth hunt to continue (FS), supported research into growing season, landscape prescribed fire (FS), did not support the permit hunt on Sylamore WMA (CR), suggested better PR on regulation changes (CR), saw the need for research into poultry litter issues (F), asked for additional spring archery turkey hunting opportunities (LR), suggested that spring seasons be identical to Missouri's (LR) and asked for the harvest summary map to be included in the spring turkey brochure (LR).

Written Comments: Fifty-six written comments were received. Table 2 has been prepared to show support or lack thereof for the four specific questions asked on Public Meeting Comment Sheets.

With regard to support of the conservative 3-week season format (Question 1), 54 of 56 written comments were in favor of this season, or a more conservative season structure, and 2 opposed it. The two opposing comments came from the Jonesboro and Russellville meeting. Support for a conservative season length seems overwhelming.

Table 2. Responses to four AGFC-posed questions on 2010 Spring Turkey Season Public Meeting Comment Sheets.

	R-1	R-2	R-3	R-4	R-5	R-6	R-7	R-8	R-9	R10	LR	TOT
Q 1 – 23 days?												
Yes	3	0	9	4	1	1	8	5	1	10	9	54
No	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Q 2 – April 10?												
Yes	3	0	2	3	1	1	9	4	1	10	7	41
No	1	0	7	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	12
Q 3 – Re-zone 17?												
Yes	1	0	2	1	1	1	3	2	1	1	4	17
No	1	0	6	3	0	0	1	0	0	6	3	24
Q 4 – Close Fall?												
Yes	2	0	8	3	0	1	7	1	0	7	6	35
No	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	4	2	3	3	18

Support for the late season opener (Question 2) was not quite as strong with 41 written comments in support and 12 comments against this proposal. Most of the written comments opposed to this proposal came from the Monticello meeting.

Support for the administrative proposal to re-zone Turkey Zone 17 and adopt the season of the adjacent state, either TN or MS, on lands east of the main channel of the Mississippi River received mixed support. Primary opposition seemed to come from the Monticello and Fayetteville meetings. Quite a few folks expressed no opinion on this issue, and their comments suggested they had no opinion because it didn't affect them.

Support to close all fall turkey seasons was about two for closure to one against on these forms, although it has been running closer to 50:50 on other comments received by the Commission. Support for closing the fall seasons seemed to be greatest at the Monticello, Fort Smith, Fayetteville and Little Rock meetings. Support to leave these seasons open was strongest in Russellville and Calico Rock.

Written “general comments” from the Public Meeting Comments Sheets included 10 speakers requesting a shorter season (5 M, 2 FS, 2 C and 1 LR). Nine publics requested a liberalization of furbearer seasons (5 F, 2 LR and 2 M), nine requesting a no-jakes rule, except for youth (6 FS, 2 M and 1 C) and nine stating they had no opinion on the proposal to re-zone Turkey Zone 17 (4 R, 2 F, 1 LR, 1 J and 1 FS). Eight specifically commented they wanted a Monday opener for the regular season (3 LR, 2 C, 1 M, 1 J and 1 FS). Six hunters wrote they were for half-day hunting (3 M, 2 R and 1 J). Several topics received five comments each, including: a request for a 1 gobbler limit (3 M, 1 C and 1 FS), comments against late

season prescribed fire on national forests (4 FS and 1 F), a request for a later opening date than at present (5 FS) and support for more turkey research (4 F and 1 LR). Four comments dealt specifically with feral hog problems (2 M and 2 R). Seven topics received 3 comments each, including: support for the current pre-season youth hunts (1 M, 1 J and 1 MI), a request to close fall seasons (1 M, 1 FS and 1 CR), support for gobblers-only in the fall hunts (2 FS and 1 LR), a request to eliminate the permit hunt on Sylamore (3 R), a request from better notification of regulations changes (1 R and 2 F), support for consistent seasons (2 R and 1 J) and a request for re-stocking of wild turkeys (1 F and 2 LR). Those items with two comments included a request for an earlier opening date (1 J and 1 LR), support for outlawing all feeding (1 M and 1 LR), suggestions to do the same as Missouri in terms of regulations (1 FS and 1 LR), a request to allow 65+ hunters to hunt during the pre-season youth hunts (2 R), a suggestion to conduct deer hunter turkey observation surveys (2 F), support for habitat improvement (2 LR) and a request to add pre-regular-season archery hunts (2 LR). Single written comments were received on a variety of topics, including: a suggestion to move youth hunts back to a WMA-only status (C), a request to move youth hunts after regular season hunts (J), a request to close the bearded hen season in spring (M), support for stopping feeding after Jan. 1 (M), a request to make pre-season calling to turkeys illegal (M), a request for more enforcement during youth hunts (M), support to AGFC for their turkey management efforts (M), a request to split the spring season into 2 segments (M), support to outlaw decoy use (FS), support for closing the spring season in some counties (FS), a request for permit hunts only on Ft. Chaffee (FS), support for no feeding during spring seasons (R), support for year-round feeding (F), an opinion that it was a mistake to close checkstations and go to tele-check (F), a request for AGFC to set up breeding pens for raising turkeys to stock (LR), comments on ice damage problems (J), a suggestion to go back to pre-2000 regulations (C), support for the 2-bird bag limit in spring (C), a suggestion to limit non-residents to one turkey in spring (C), a comment on the need for a new turkey biologist (C), a request for more archery-only hunts (LR) and comments on poor turkey management by AGFC (LR).

Web and Email Comments: These comments will continue to be received up until the September Commission briefing; therefore, a breakdown of these final results will be presented at the briefing.

Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey Comments: Surveys were received from 253 turkey hunters in spring 2008. Half of those hunters chose to provide comments on turkey hunting and/or turkey management on the back page of the survey form. A brief breakdown of these comments will also be made at the September Commission briefing.

Final Comments: The 2010 spring turkey season public meetings were better attended than they have been in the past, possibly because of more controversial season proposals or other issues. In addition, the overall number of comments on spring and fall turkey seasons has increased considerably, due to more media coverage through *Arkansas Outdoors* news releases, an email blast sent to National Wild Turkey Federation members and continued promotion of comments on AGFC's website and through other social media outlets. When it is all added up prior to the September Commission briefing—when final public comments will be presented—several hundred total comments will have been received.

At this year's public meetings, most speakers continued to express the feeling that turkey numbers were down or poor in areas they hunt. Almost unanimous support seemed to exist for the 23-day season structure, or for a shorter season. However, support for the current later season opening date was not as strong—particularly in south Arkansas. There seemed to be quite a bit of support for closing all fall turkey seasons at these meetings, but a minority wanted seasons to remain open. The comments from these public meeting in combination with several hundred other comments on turkey seasons and turkey management from other sources should give a clearer picture of the opinions and desires of Arkansas turkey hunters as the Commission goes through the process of setting regulations for turkey hunting in The Natural State.