

**Pennsylvania 2012 Fall Wild Turkey Hunter
Survey Results**



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Each year (2010-2014), as part of our 5-year hen wild turkey harvest and survival rate research study, the Pennsylvania Game Commission is conducting an annual survey of Pennsylvania fall wild turkey hunters to evaluate hunter satisfaction, turkey hunter recruitment, and reactivation of former fall turkey hunters, particularly due to fall season changes in 2010 and 2011.

Questions were similar to the 2010 and 2011 surveys (where applicable) for comparisons between years, and were developed in-house in collaboration with our agency’s Human Dimensions Specialist (Casalena 2012). Each year we survey 10,000 randomly selected hunting license buyers, which provide a sufficient cross-section of the hunting population to partition among youth and adult hunters, and those who have hunted turkeys in the past versus new turkey hunters. In 2010 and 2011 surveys were mailed one week after we mailed a postcard announcement in early January informing hunters of the upcoming survey, with a follow-up reminder postcard to non-respondents (Dillman 1978). In 2012 the initial postcard was a request for hunters to complete the survey online, with the website provided, but also stipulated that we would mail a paper survey in two weeks if they were unable to complete the survey online.

Survey response rate for the 2012 survey was 56% compared to 50% in 2011 and 46% in 2010. Each year of the survey approximately one-third of the respondents hunted fall turkey (Figure 1).

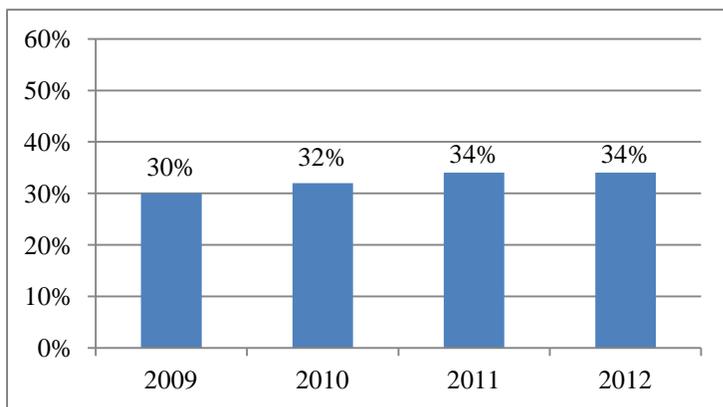


Figure 1. Annual participation in fall wild turkey hunting for survey respondents who hunt fall wild turkey season.

The majority of those who fall turkey hunt have hunted the species each fall for the last 3 years (51%; Figure 2). Of those who hunted fall turkeys at least 1 of the past 3 years, the proportion of respondents hunting only in 2012 (15%) was significantly higher than the proportion hunting 2011 only or 2010 only (7% and 9%, respectively, Figure 2). This increase may be related to a

new regulation which allowed mentored youth to participate in fall turkey hunting.

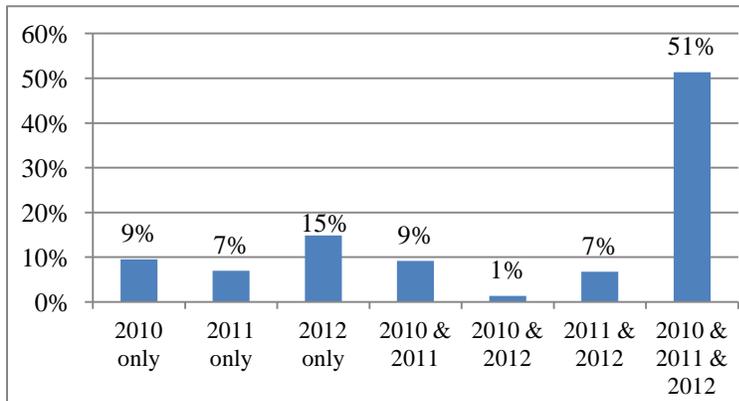


Figure 2. Pennsylvania fall turkey hunting participation by those survey respondents who participated in at least 1 fall turkey season, 2010 - 2012.

Fall turkey hunting participation in 2012 (119,493), estimated from annual game-take hunter survey data, decreased 23% from the previous 3-year average (154,973; Johnson et al. 2012) even though 2012 was the third year of the Thanksgiving season segment, established to increase hunter participation. This decrease, however, may be more a function of the long-term decreasing trend in general hunting in Pennsylvania because the percent of all hunters who fall turkey hunt has remained the same (Figure 1).

Participation during the 2 season segments differed somewhat from last year (Figure 3), but may be a factor of available time and weather during the season. In many parts of Pennsylvania the weather was nicer in 2012 than 2011 (2 hurricanes prior to the season), and the acorn mast crop was better in 2012 versus 2011. Fall harvest, from annual game-take hunter survey data, was approximately 12% higher in 2010 than in 2012 and 10% higher than in 2011 (Johnson et al. 2012). More importantly, hunters continue utilizing both season segments.

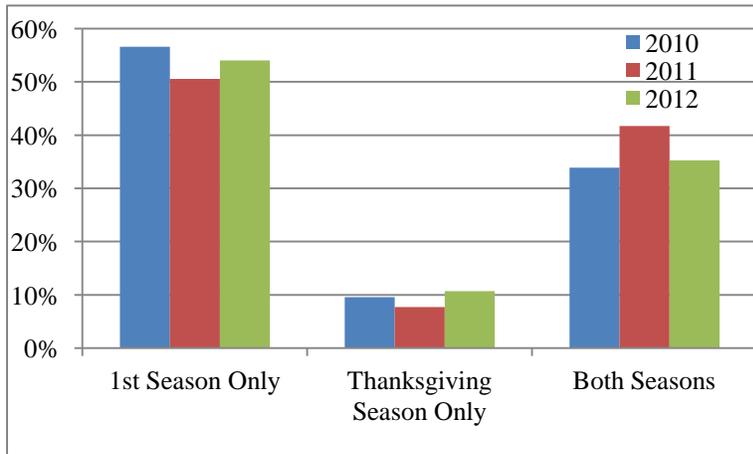
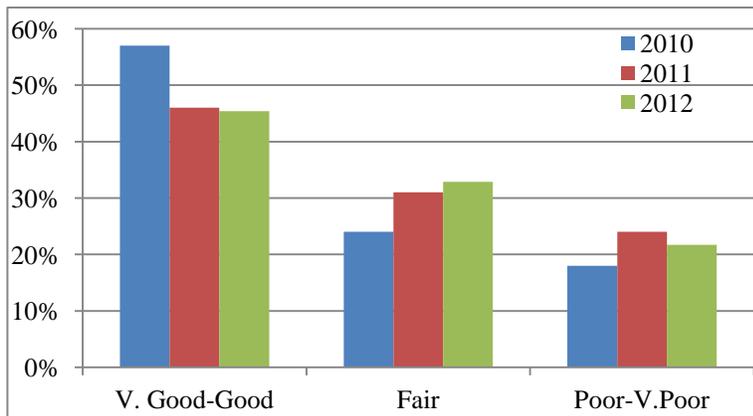


Figure 3. Pennsylvania fall wild turkey hunter participation by segment, 2010 - 2012. First segment was the traditional season in early November prior to black bear season (2–3 weeks depending on Wildlife Management Unit). Thanksgiving segment, begun in 2010, is Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday – Saturday.

Hunter satisfaction in 2012 (45%) was similar to 2011 (46%), both of which were lower than 2010 (57%; Figure 4). Harvest success also decreased from 2010 (9%) to 2012 (7%), suggesting a slight correlation between success and satisfaction. We will investigate this relationship further



for the final report on the overall project.

Figure 4. Pennsylvania fall wild turkey hunter satisfaction with the fall wild turkey seasons, 2010 - 2012.

When asked their level of satisfaction with different aspects of the fall 2012 season, there were no general consensus among current fall turkey hunters, similar to 2011 and 2010. They were generally satisfied with the 3-day Thanksgiving season in that 61% were satisfied with the Thanksgiving Day hunt (60% in both 2011 and 2010), 66% were satisfied with the Friday after Thanksgiving (69% and 68%, respectively in 2011 and 2010) and 66% were satisfied with the Saturday after Thanksgiving (66% and 68%, respectively in 2011 and 2010).

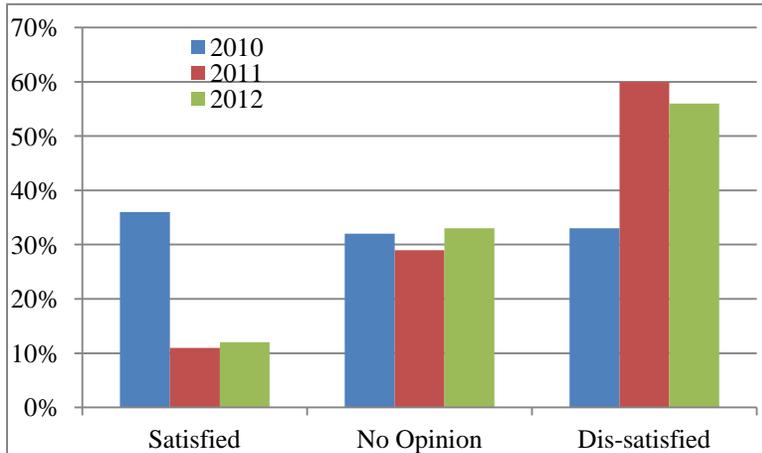


Figure 5. Pennsylvania fall wild turkey hunter satisfaction regarding returning the fall wild turkey season to the former season structure, prior to 2010, with no 3-day Thanksgiving season segment, 2010 - 2012.

When asked their level of satisfaction if the seasons were returned to the former structure with no Thanksgiving segment, most desired to maintain the Thanksgiving season, similar to last year, but a significant change in opinion from 2010 (Figure 5). In 2011 and 2012 only 11% would be satisfied if the season was returned to the former format. However, satisfaction with the new Thanksgiving season remained similar for all 3 years, 56% in 2012, 57% in 2011 and 54% in 2010. This again demonstrates that hunter satisfaction incorporates more than just season structure.

Non-turkey hunters were asked how 10 factors (4 of which were related to length and timing of fall turkey season) likely would influence their interest in starting to participate annually in fall turkey hunting. The top 3 reasons remained the same all three years; more free time to hunt, higher turkey populations and having a place to hunt and were not related to season structure (Figure 6). The top reason mimicked that of nationwide surveys for the need of more free time to hunt.

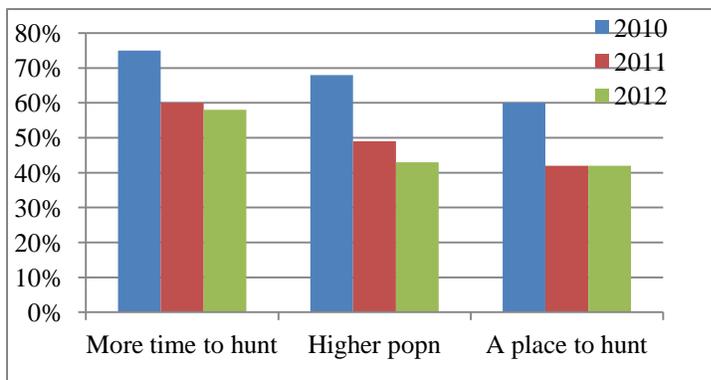


Figure 6. Top three factors that would influence Pennsylvania hunters' interest in starting fall wild turkey hunting, 2010 - 2012.

Summary

For the first three years it appears existing turkey hunters are satisfied with the additional recreational opportunity with the Thanksgiving holiday season segment, but non-turkey hunters may simply be too busy to take advantage of this opportunity.

Hunter satisfaction and harvest success were lower in both 2012 and 2011 than in 2010 even though the traditional season structure was reinstated in 2011 and the Thanksgiving season was maintained, both of which provided more hunting days than in 2010. This suggests success, and possibly satisfaction, may not be directly correlated with season structure, but other factors such as recruitment (i.e., fall flock size), natural food sources and weather during the hunting season may also influence success and satisfaction. During all three years, and similar to trends observed nationally, available time, higher turkey populations and a place to hunt had more of an influence than season structure on influencing participation by non-turkey hunters.

Literature Cited

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