

Appendix H

Specific Management Recommendations for Wild Turkeys



Eastern wild turkeys have been restocked or, are currently being restocked in most of the Pineywoods. Beginning in 1987, using wild-trapped birds from wild eastern turkey populations in the Eastern United States, an intensive restoration effort was begun to restore these native birds to eastern Texas where there was suitable habitat and annual rainfall exceeds 35 inches. This restocking program is currently (1996) in the later stages, but

hunnable populations exist only in Red River County where a spring season (gobblers only) was held in 1995.

Although turkeys are non-migratory resident species, they have large home ranges that change with the season of the year. Turkeys tend to be widely dispersed during the spring and summer nesting/brood-rearing period. Nesting and brood-rearing habitat is similar to that required for quail, but on a larger scale: scattered thickets of low growing brush, patchy residual herbaceous vegetation, a moderately grazed, diverse grass/forb plant community that produces seeds and insects.

After the breeding season, numerous smaller flocks that were widely dispersed during the summer tend to congregate into large winter flocks. The ranges of winter flocks are centered around riparian areas (the flood plains of large creeks and rivers) that have moderately dense stands of tall, full canopied trees. These winter flocks will disperse several miles from their riparian area roost sites on daily feeding forays. Turkeys are attracted to feeders (not recommended for eastern turkey) and supplemental food plantings provided for deer and quail. The availability of a food source, would determine to what extent turkeys are present during the winter months.

Habitat management for the wild turkey concerns the availability of water, food, and cover. The distribution of these key components of the range is of major importance. Turkeys require water daily and can obtain water from foods or free water (ponds, creeks, rivers, etc.) Grassy or brushy nesting and brood-rearing cover is probably the most important cover requirement. Food availability of the native range can be increased by the following activities: (1) Moderately stock the range with domestic

animals. (2) Utilize a deferred rotation system of grazing. (3) Control total deer numbers by harvesting does. (4) Proper timber management. (5) Prescribed burns can be utilized to control understory vegetation in forested areas, as well as increase production of forbs, grasses and fruit or mast producing browse plants. In summary, range management activities that increase the diversity of grasses, forbs, shrubs, trees, and vines improves the habitat for the wild turkey. These same management practices are also beneficial to deer, quail, and many other wildlife species.

Turkey also need escape cover to travel to and from roosting sites. Dense brush thickets or solid block clearing both furnish poor habitat for the turkey. Clearing programs that leave brush strips between cleared areas are advantageous. If clearing is needed to improve the range, irregular shaped cleared strips that follow topography are best.