

2023 SPRING WILD TURKEY HARVEST

ACTIVITY:

In 2023, Delaware's spring turkey hunting season ran from 8 April to 6 May, with a youth/non-ambulatory hunt day on 1 April. Only bearded birds may be legally harvested. Private land hunters were allowed to hunt all 25 days of the season; public land hunters were selected through a preseason lottery to hunt one of four, week-long season segments (A, B, C, and D) during the same 25-day period (no Sunday hunting). Mandatory check stations were established to collect biological information from all harvested birds.

REMARKS:

In 2023, 785 Wild Turkeys, (*Meleagris gallopavo*) were reported harvested, a 32% increase over the previous season ($n = 567$; Figure 1.1). For the purposes of harvest reporting, Delaware is divided into 4 management regions, comprised of 18 wildlife management zones (Figure 1.2). All regions fell in the same order of harvest volume as the previous year, with the Interior region yielding the greatest harvest. The Interior region (i.e., Zones 2, 4, 6 – 8, and 10) accounted for 47.3% ($n = 371$) of the total harvest. The Southern region (i.e., Zones 11 – 17) harvested the next greatest proportion of birds (34.0%; $n = 267$). This was followed by the Bayshore region (i.e. Zones 3, 5, and 9) and consisted of 15.3% ($n = 120$) of the state's harvest. Lastly, the northern region (i.e., Zones 1A and 1B) harvested, 1.2% ($n = 11$) of the total state harvest. 3 birds were harvested from unknown locations due to data collection errors when the hunter registered the turkey. The Bayshore region gained a 2-percentage point increase of the harvest share over the previous year, while the Interior and Southern regions lost 1 percentage point of harvest share each. Reported harvest was greatest in wildlife management Zone 6, which accounted for 14.3% ($n = 112$) of the total harvest (Table 1.1) The Zone 6 share of the harvest relative to other zones decreased slightly from 2022, but raw harvest and percentage of shared harvest increased in nearly all other zones (Table 1.1)

Most harvested birds were taken from private lands (81.9%, $n = 643$). The harvest of 135 (17.2%) turkeys on public lands was higher than 2022 and is likely a record high public lands turkey harvest since 1991 when turkey hunting was opened. The top four public lands for harvesting a Wild Turkey in 2022 were: Redden State Forest ($n = 26$, 19.3%), Norman G. Wilder Wildlife Area ($n = 13$, 9.6%), Midlands Wildlife Area ($n = 11$, 8.1%), and Blackiston Wildlife Area ($n = 11$, 8.1%, Table 1.2).

During Delaware's annual youth/non-ambulatory turkey hunt, 33 birds were harvested up slightly from the previous season's 28 birds, and is also likely another all time record harvest. Of the 33 turkeys harvested during youth weekend in 2023, 39.4% ($n = 13$) were harvested on public lands. By week during the regular season, 46.5% ($n = 365$) of the total birds harvested were taken in Week 1; 19.0% ($n = 149$) in Week 2; 16.4% ($n = 129$) in Week 3; and 13.9% ($n = 109$) in Week 4 (Figure 1.3). In general the pace of harvest was slower than the previous year, in part due to challenging weather conditions during the first 2 weeks of spring hunting. Adult birds comprised 72.7% ($n = 571$) of the harvest, with relatively more jakes recorded than the previous year ($n = 207$, 27.3%).

PREPARED BY:

Gary A. J. Macy
Environmental Scientist III – Waterfowl and Turkey Biologist
DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife

REVIEWED BY:

Joseph E. Rogerson
Env. Program Manager II – Species Conservation and Research
DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife

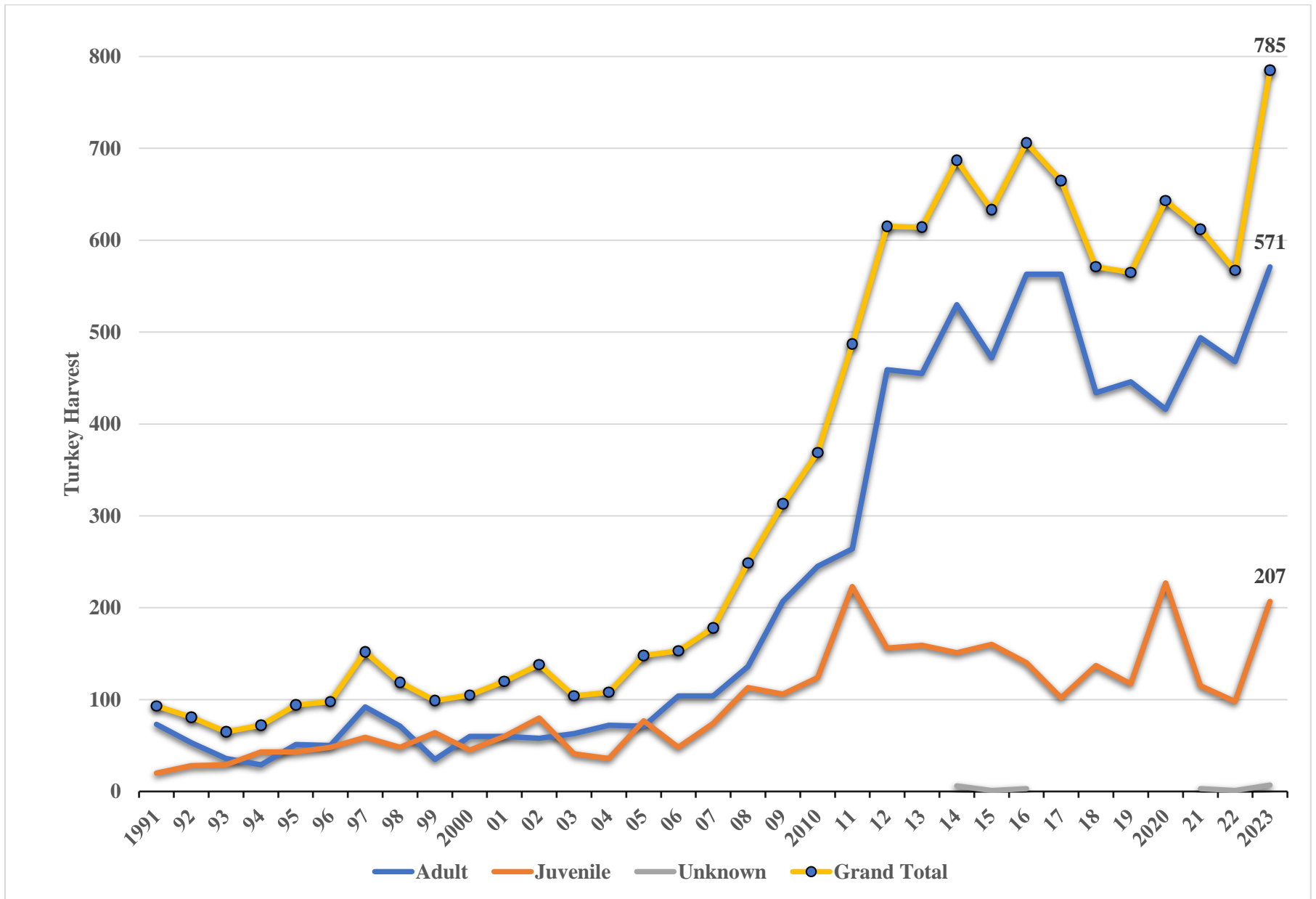


Figure 1.1. Annual harvest of Eastern Wild Turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) in Delaware from 1991 – 2023 classified by age groups (i.e., adult, juvenile, and unknown).

Table 1.1. Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) harvest distribution among Delaware Turkey Management Zones hunted during the 2023 spring turkey season. Harvest by zone data from 2019 – 2022 are also displayed.

Zone	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1A	0	0	0	0	0
1B	9	17	13	7	11
2	33	30	40	29	43
3	20	18	16	25	38
4	53	61	53	60	87
5	24	35	20	21	35
6	74	78	87	84	112
7	68	55	46	46	63
8	52	59	47	47	49
9	23	37	37	30	47
10	15	20	21	7	17
11	35	62	50	50	62
12	38	40	36	41	57
13	13	19	28	17	18
14	15	21	27	24	30
15	31	23	33	23	23
16	34	38	36	34	42
17	22	27	22	19	35
Unknown	5	3	0	3	16
Total	564	643	612	567	785

Table 1.2. Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) harvest distribution among DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife and Delaware Forest Service owned public lands hunted during the 2023 Delaware spring turkey season. Public lands harvest data from 2014 – 2022 are also displayed.

Public Land	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Assawoman WA	2	2	2	2	3	2	5	3	2	6
Augustine WA	0	0	1	0	1	0	3	1	1	5
Blackiston WA	6	4	4	6	7	4	9	6	7	8
C & D Canal WA	7	6	7	3	7	8	9	8	5	8
Cedar Swamp WA	2	3	5	4	3	4	3	3	6	5
Eagles Nest WA	2	2	1	3	2	3	4	5	2	5
Industrial Forest WA	1	3	3	1	1	2	3	0	4	1
Little Creek WA	6	7	3	8	5	2	2	5	4	1
Marshy Hope WA	1	2	2	4	3	2	4	3	0	0
Midlands WA	5	5	5	11	8	4	4	9	8	11
Milford Neck WA	1	2	5	4	4	5	4	8	4	11
Nanticoke WA	1	1	2	3	2	1	3	5	4	6
Norman G. Wilder WA	12	9	12	12	10	11	6	12	12	13
Old Furnace WA	3	1	3	3	5	1	5	3	3	2
Prime Hook WA	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Tappahanna WA	2	2	3	6	4	3	3	4	4	4
Ted Harvey CA	1	1	1	4	3	2	6	1	1	5
Woodland Beach WA	3	3	0	0	3	3	2	2	3	3
Blackbird State Forest	2	0	8	9	8	7	7	12	5	9
Redden State Forest	23	12	21	22	15	12	21	19	18	26
Taber State Forest	3	1	0	1	1	4	2	2	5	2
Total	83	66	88	106	95	81	106	112	98	134

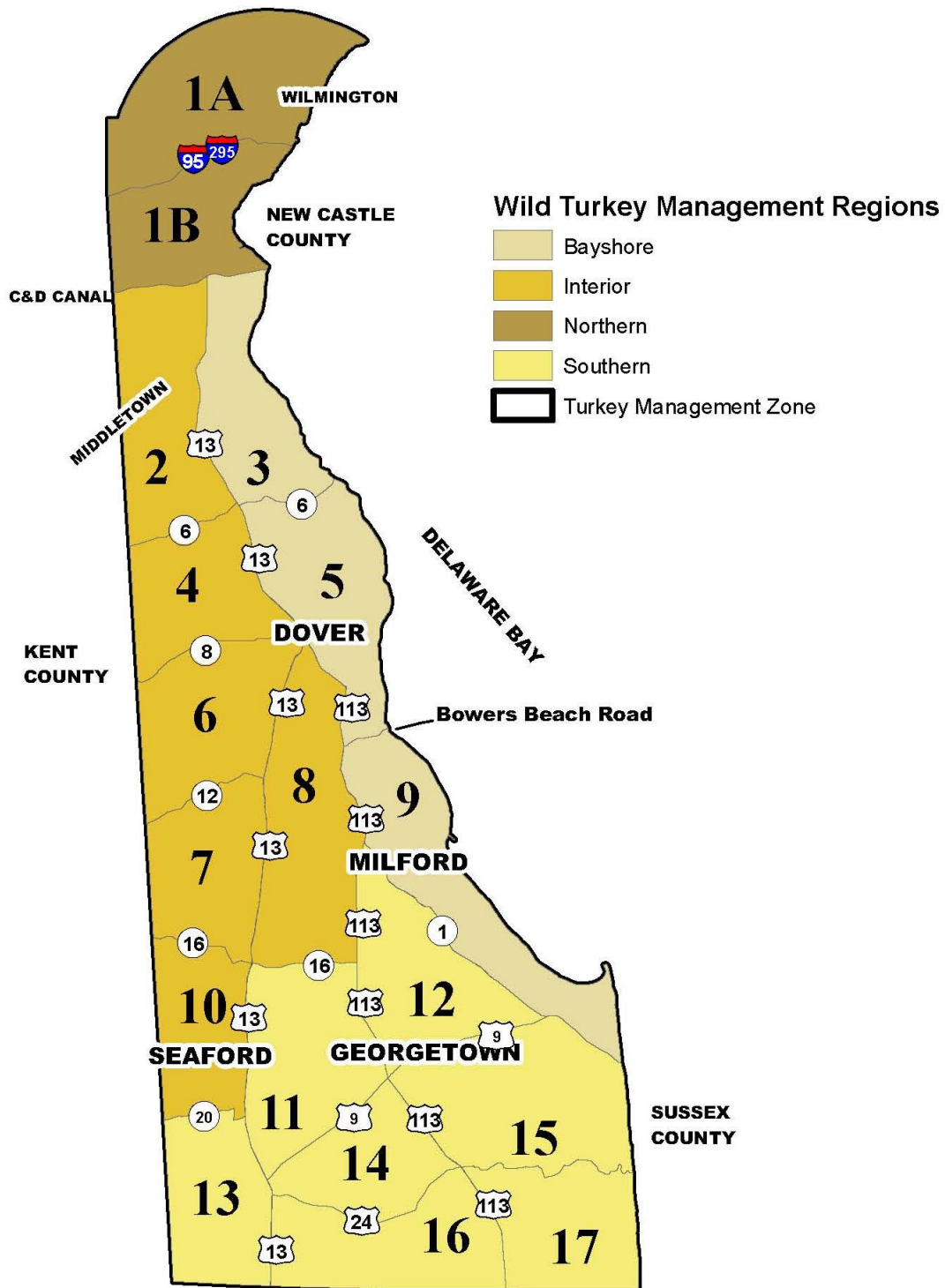


Figure 1.2. Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) management regions (Bayshore [tan], Interior [amber], Northern [light brown], and Southern [yellow]) and associated management zones (1A, 1B, and 2 – 17) in Delaware.

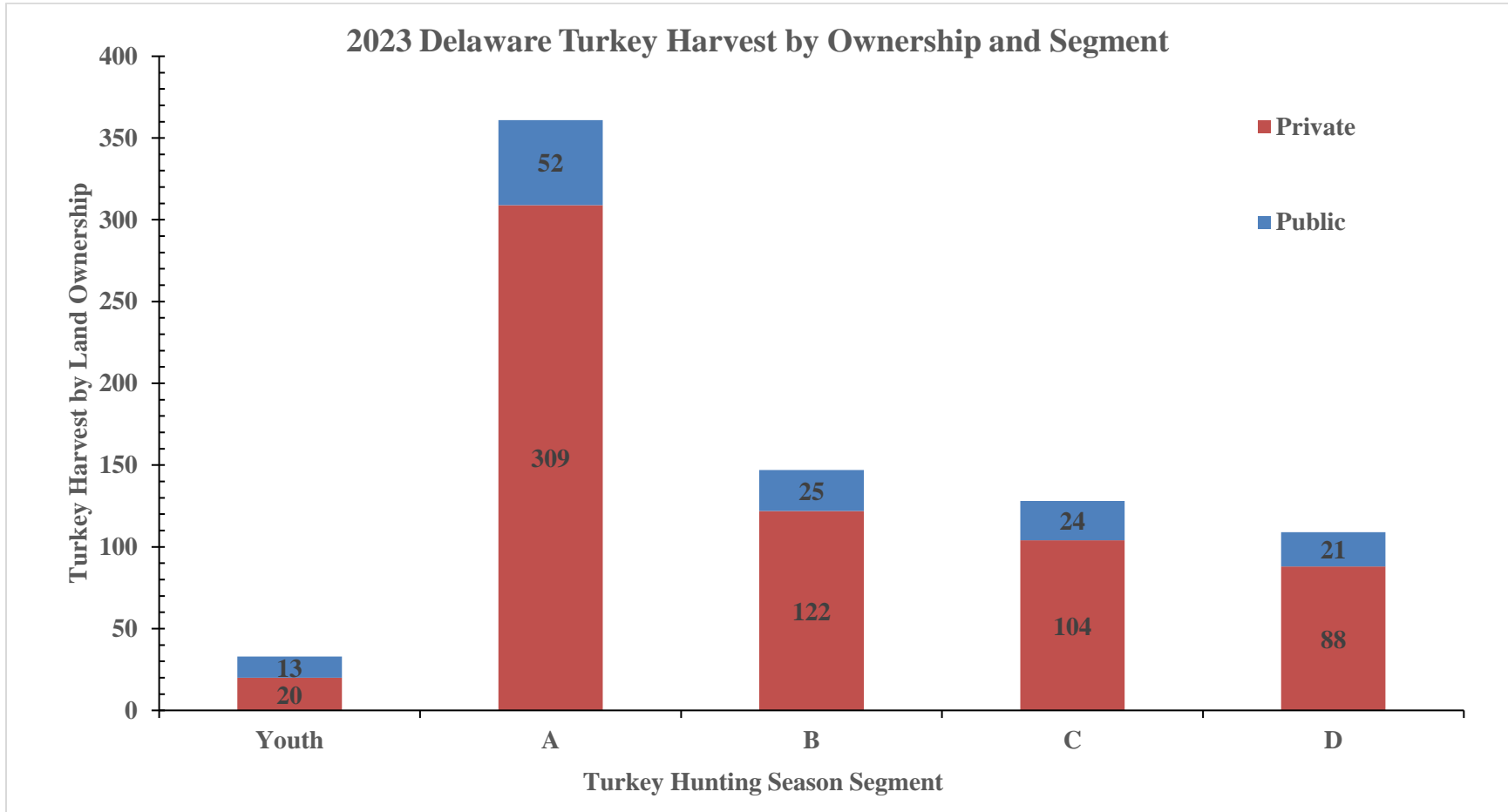


Figure 1.3. Spring 2023 Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) harvest by week on public and private lands. Including youth (1 April, 2023) and regular seasons (8 April – 6 May, 2023)