

Appendix H

Specific Management Recommendations for Rio Grande Wild Turkeys



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 and supplemental food plantings provided for deer and quail. The nearness of a ranch to a winter roost site(s), and 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 and (4) prescribed burns can be utilized to retain openings and control regrowth cedar 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.

Preservation of roosting sites is a key factor to maintain a turkey population on a sustained basis. Turkey also need escape cover to travel to and from roosting sites. Mature trees utilized as roosting sites include pecan, cypress, sycamore, cottonwood, most large oaks, elm, hackberry, western soapberry, and large mesquite. 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. Avoid removing hardwood trees such as the various species of oaks, hackberry, elm, or large mesquite. If clearing is needed to improve the range, irregular shaped cleared strips that follow topography are best.

Supplemental plantings and feeding high protein pelleted feed, especially during the period January through March will help increase winter survival and will also increase the reproductive potential of the hens.

With regard to harvest, approximately 20% of the estimated turkey population can be harvested annually. Adjustments in the harvest can be made on an annual basis. These adjustments will depend upon the nesting success and range conditions.

For more information, refer to TPWD publication PWD RP W7100-263, Rio Grande Turkey Habitat Management, by George W. Litton and Fielding Harwell.