

2021 Kentucky Spring Turkey Season Summary

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Highlights

- Kentucky hunters reported harvesting a statewide total of 29,222 turkeys during the 2021 spring season (Table 1, Figure 1a).
- The top 5 counties for total harvest were Muhlenberg County (622), Logan County (606), Christian County (553), Pulaski County (530), and Hart County (521) (Figure 2a). These are large counties, so viewing county harvest per square mile of forest habitat shows considerable harvest across the state (Figure 1b).
- This year's harvest changed -7.9% from last spring, -0.9% change from the 3-year average, and -4.2% change from the 5-year average (Table 1).
- Harvest decreased in 8 of the 9 Commission Districts and in 4 of the 5 Wildlife Division Regions (Table 2).
 - The average decline from last season among districts and regions was -10%.
 - The greatest percentage decreases were in the 7th Commission District (-15.7%) and the Bluegrass Region (-14.7%).
 - The greatest percentage increase was in the 1st Commission District and the Purchase Region (10.1%).
- The percentage of hunters that harvested the statewide bag limit of 2 turkeys was 25.8%, which did not differ from last season or the 5-year average (Table 1).
- Private land harvest changed by -9.0% compared to last year and by -4.9% compared to the 5-year average (Table 1).
- Public land harvest changed by 14.0% and by 7.3 compared to the 5-year average (Table 1).
- In 2020, non-resident hunters harvested just 412 turkeys due to license sales restrictions and travel limitations during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, the non-resident harvest increased to 3,768 this spring compared to 3,456 in 2019 (a 9.0% change) and the 5-year average (2015-2019) of 3,235 (a 16.5% change) (Table 1).
- Nonresidents accounted for 26.7% of total public lands harvest, a 9.6% change from 2019 and a 27.8% change from the 5-year average (Table 1).

- The percentage of jakes in the harvest was 10.4%, compared to 13.6% in 2020 and the previous 5-year average (2016-2020) of 13.0% (Table 1). Hunters preferentially harvest adult gobblers, but a change in the proportion of jakes may indicate more adults gobblers were in the population this year, reflecting decent reproduction 2 years ago (Figure 5).
- Harvest on opening weekend of the statewide season (34% of the entire season total) changed by 0.6% from last season and 10.4% from the 5-year average (Table 1, Figure 3).
- Harvests on weekends changed -0.1% from last season and 2.1% from the 5-year average. Weekday harvests changed -14.0% and -11.9% from the 5-year average (Table 1, Figure 3).
- Youth season harvest was 1,483, which was a -32.4% change from last spring and a -11.1% change from the 5-year average (Table 1, Figure 3). Easter fell on the second day of the youth season and probably reduced hunting participation and effort.
- License sales (150,855) changed 8.2% from last spring (Table 3, Figure 4). This only includes license and permit types conferring spring turkey hunting privileges, and only those sold for the 2021-22 hunting season through the end of Spring Turkey Season (May 9th). This is our best idea of eligible turkey hunters. We do not know the actual number of turkey hunters because landowners are license-exempt and those with the privilege to spring turkey hunt (Sportsman's and Senior licenses) may not turkey hunt. Based on a survey conducted after the 2020 season, we estimated that about 60% of eligible license holders turkey hunted, which would translate to about 75,000 to 85,000 hunters.
 - Youth permits and licenses changed -10.9% from last season and -4.2% from the 5-year average.
 - Resident Sportsman's licenses changed -0.4% from last season and 18.1% from the 5-year average.
 - Resident Spring Turkey Permits changed -36.9% from last season and -43.2% from the 5-year average, but these make up a small proportion of all sales due to the popularity of Sportsman's licenses.
- Viewing spring turkey harvest relative to the number of hunters or the amount of hunting effort can provide different perspectives.
 - Compared to the number of eligible hunters, turkey harvest was lower (Figure 6). In other words, license sales increased more than harvest, which at first glance this might suggest lower hunter success. However, what really matters is how many days hunters hunted.
 - The average days of hunting per turkey harvested changed -25% compared to last year (Figure 7). This indicates that, although total harvest declined, hunters were more efficient this year. These figures are based on responses by hunters who checked their turkey online, who were prompted with this

question. As mentioned above, contributors to the considerable reduction in hunting effort and the slight reduction in harvest likely included Easter (second day of youth season), inclement weather (rain, snow, and cold temperatures during the general season), Mother’s Day (last day of turkey season), and COVID-19 recovery (more hunters returning to work with less time off).

Spring Turkey Harvest: Tables and Figures

The following tables, graphs, and maps summarize this year’s spring turkey harvest and license sales in greater detail. With no major regulation changes since 2006, Kentucky’s harvest figures are comparable over a relatively long time span, giving us more confidence in observed trends.

Note that the statewide youth season is the first weekend in April (2 days), while the statewide general season runs from the Saturday closest to April 15 for 23 consecutive days. Season dates and regulations differ on some areas, particularly federal installations such as Ft. Campbell, Ft. Knox, and Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area (consult the spring hunting guide for details).

Table 1. 2021 Spring Turkey Harvest Breakdown

Category of Interest	This Season	Last Season	3-Year Avg.	5-Year Avg.	10-Year Avg.	% Change from Prev. Yr.	% Change from 3-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 5-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 10-Yr. Avg.
Entire Harvest (All Telechecked Turkeys)	29,222	31,719	29,492	30,519	31,119	-7.9	-0.9	-4.2	-6.1
Statewide 23-Day Season	27,554	29,334	27,720	28,677	29,195	-6.1	-0.6	-3.9	-5.6
Percentage of Jakes in the Harvest	10.4	13.6	12.9	13.0	13.5	-23.7	-20.0	-20.2	-23.5
% of successful hunters that harvested 2 turkeys	25.8	25.7	25.4	25.7	25.5	0.3	1.6	0.3	1.2
Private Land	27,476	30,188	27,953	28,891	29,406	-9.0	-1.7	-4.9	-6.6
Public Land	1,746	1,531	1,538	1,628	1,712	14.0	13.5	7.3	2.0
Resident Hunters*	24,536	30,054	26,346	27,084	27,653	-18.4	-6.9	-9.4	-11.3
Non-Resident Hunters *	3,768	3,456	3,342	3,235	3,257	9.0	12.7	16.5	15.7
% of Public Land Harvest by Residents *	71.8	73.7	75.4	77.8	79.1	-2.6	-4.7	-7.6	-9.2

Category of Interest	This Season	Last Season	3-Year Avg.	5-Year Avg.	10-Year Avg.	% Change from Prev. Yr.	% Change from 3-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 5-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 10-Yr. Avg.
% of Public Land Harvest by Non-Residents *	26.7	24.3	22.9	20.9	19.9	9.6	16.7	27.8	34.4
License-Exempt Landowners/Tenants	2,401	3,278	2,980	3,129	3,184	-26.8	-19.4	-23.3	-24.6
Youth Hunters	1,483	2,193	1,607	1,669	1,748	-32.4	-7.7	-11.1	-15.1
Opening Weekend	10,037	9,978	8,619	9,090	9,264	0.6	16.5	10.4	8.3
Weekends	16,691	16,704	15,690	16,351	16,683	-0.1	6.4	2.1	0.0
Weekdays	10,863	12,630	12,031	12,327	12,512	-14.0	-9.7	-11.9	-13.2

*In 2020, non-resident license sales were restricted due to COVID-19, so the harvest by non-resident hunters was far less than is typical. For "non-resident harvest" in the table above, "Last Year" refers to 2019 instead of 2020 to provide a comparison with years when licenses were not restricted.

Table 2. 2021 Spring Turkey Harvest Breakdown by Commission District and Wildlife Region

Category of Interest	This Season	Last Season	3-Year Avg.	5-Year Avg.	10-Year Avg.	% Change from Prev. Yr.	% Change from 3-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 5-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 10-Yr. Avg.
Bluegrass Region	6,082	7,130	6,404	6,519	6,640	-14.7	-5.0	-6.7	-8.4
Green River Region	8,455	9,374	8,704	8,922	9,379	-9.8	-2.9	-5.2	-9.8
Northeast Region	4,052	4,429	4,127	4,302	4,156	-8.5	-1.8	-5.8	-2.5
Purchase Region	3,756	3,411	3,325	3,569	3,568	10.1	13.0	5.3	5.3
Southeast Region	6,877	7,375	6,932	7,208	7,376	-6.8	-0.8	-4.6	-6.8
1st Commission District	3,756	3,411	3,325	3,569	3,568	10.1	13.0	5.3	5.3
2nd Commission District	5,076	5,387	5,026	5,203	5,402	-5.8	1.0	-2.4	-6.0

Category of Interest	This Season	Last Season	3-Year Avg.	5-Year Avg.	10-Year Avg.	% Change from Prev. Yr.	% Change from 3-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 5-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 10-Yr. Avg.
3rd Commission District	1,527	1,696	1,560	1,624	1,717	-10.0	-2.1	-5.9	-11.1
4th Commission District	5,002	5,873	5,422	5,359	5,527	-14.8	-7.7	-6.7	-9.5
5th Commission District	2,806	3,301	2,928	3,048	3,100	-15.0	-4.2	-7.9	-9.5
6th Commission District	3,121	3,566	3,208	3,264	3,347	-12.5	-2.7	-4.4	-6.8
7th Commission District	2,310	2,739	2,428	2,573	2,645	-15.7	-4.9	-10.2	-12.7
8th Commission District	2,804	2,921	2,843	2,954	2,826	-4.0	-1.4	-5.1	-0.8
9th Commission District	2,820	2,825	2,751	2,926	2,986	-0.2	2.5	-3.6	-5.6

Figure 1a. Annual Statewide Spring Turkey Harvest Totals

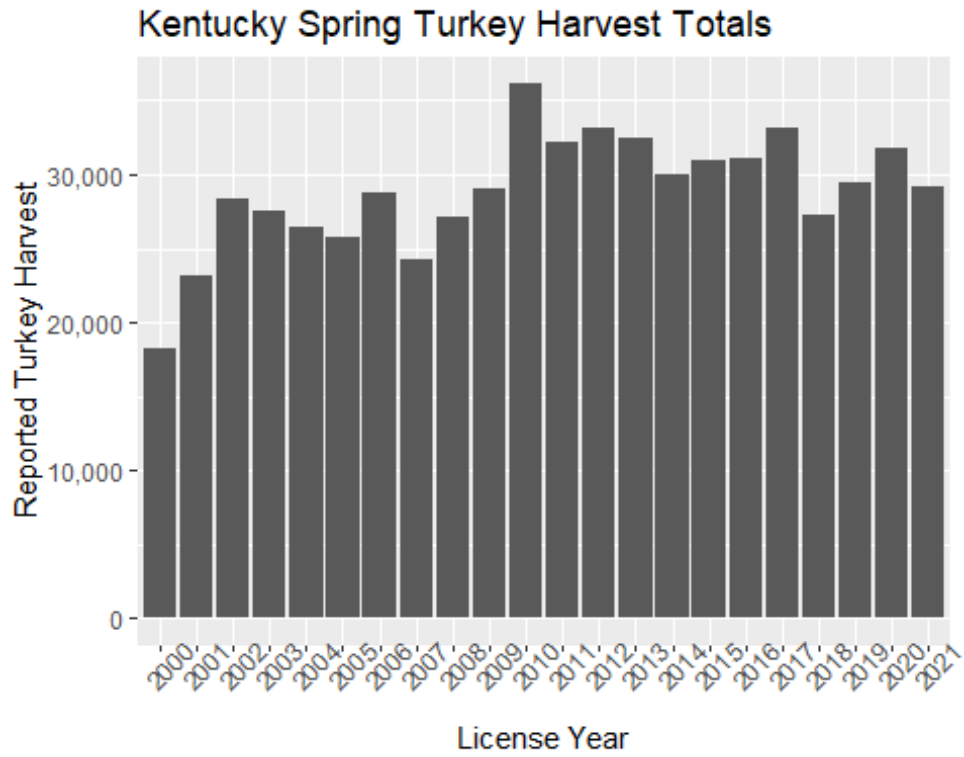


Figure 1b. Annual Statewide Spring Turkey Harvest Totals by Commission District

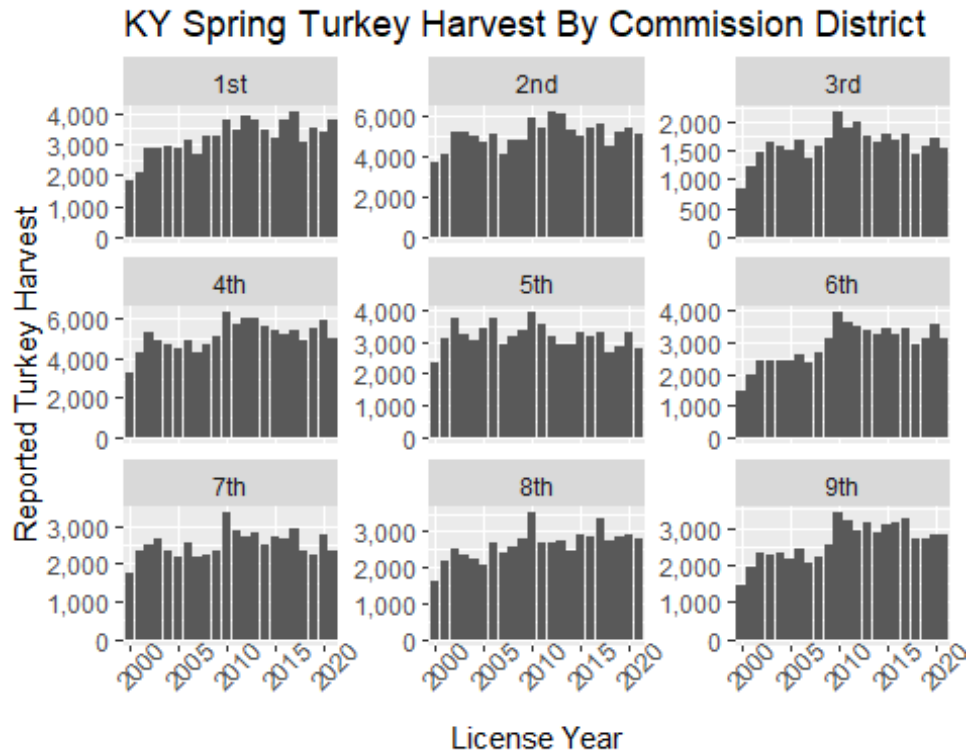


Figure 1c. Annual Statewide Spring Turkey Harvest Totals by Region

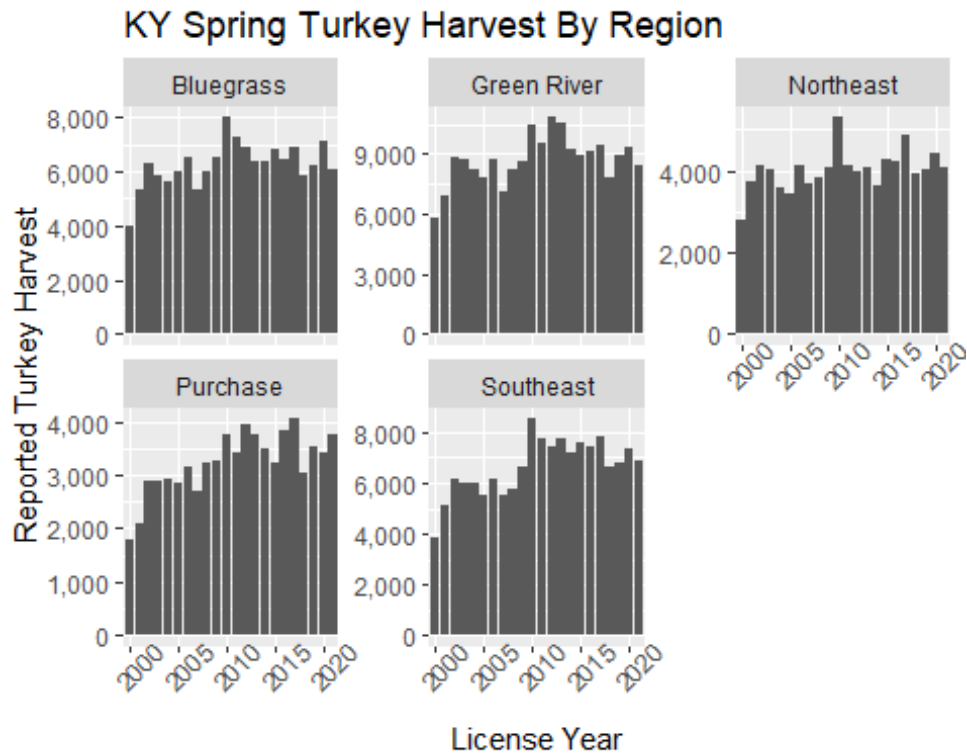


Figure 2a. 2021 Spring Turkey Harvest by County

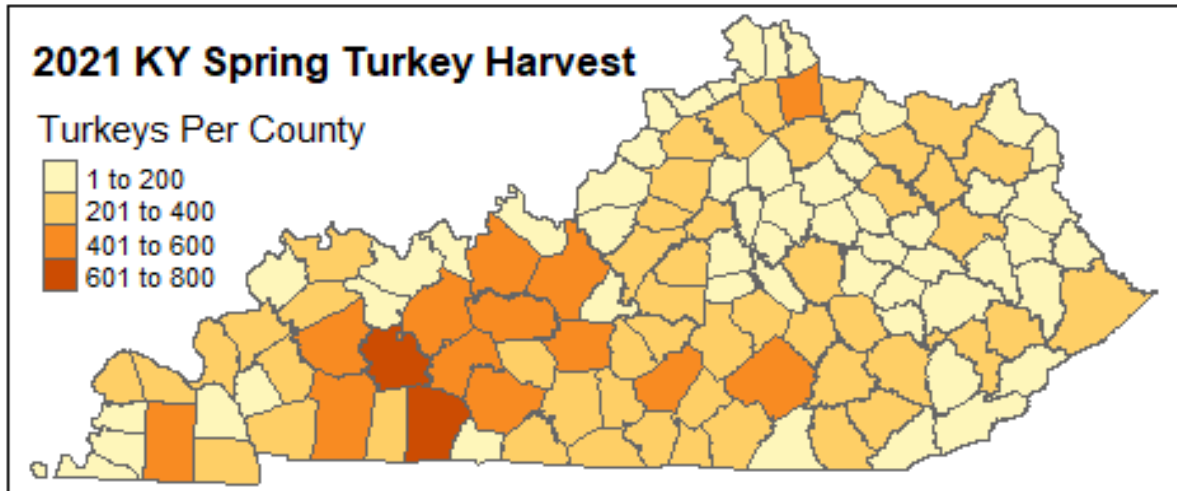


Figure 2b. 2021 Spring Turkey Harvest by County per Square Mile of Forest Habitat

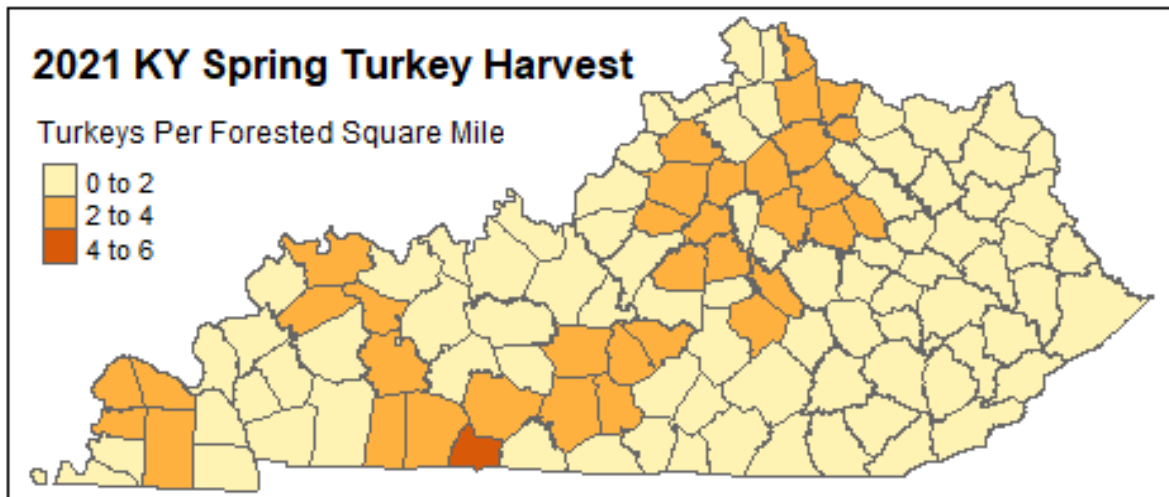


Figure 3. 2021 Spring Turkey Harvest Proportionally through the Season

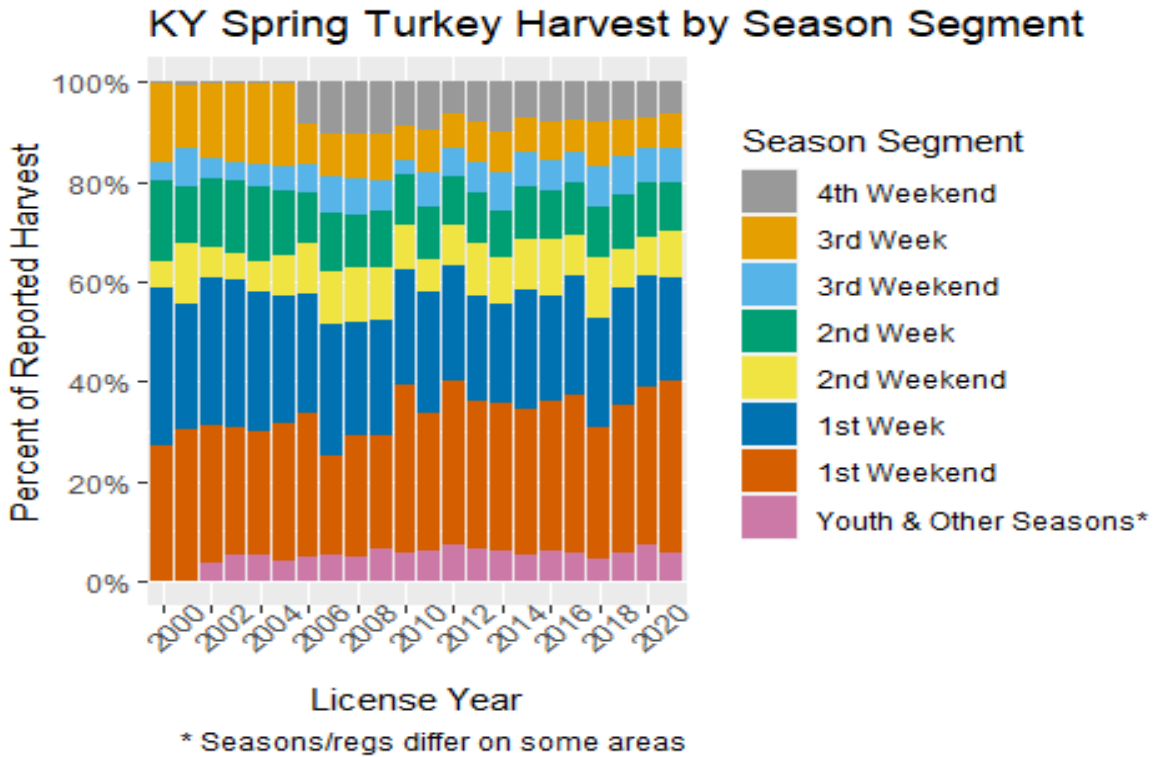


Table 3. 2021 License Sales Breakdown (through end of spring turkey season)

Category	2021	2020	3-Year Avg.	5-Year Avg.	10-Year Avg.	% Change from 2020	% Change from 3-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 5-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 10-Yr. Avg.
Resident, Senior License	58,490	50,901	53,775.33	55,783	53,403.7	14.9	8.8	4.9	9.5
Resident, Sportsman's License	61,033	61,271	53,973.33	51,699.4	48,889.9	-0.4	13.1	18.1	24.8
Resident, Disabled License	14,462	14,846	16,796.67	19,477.4	22,781.5	-2.6	-13.9	-25.7	-36.5
Resident, Spring Turkey Permit	4,211	6,678	5,948	7,415.2	9,695.8	-36.9	-29.2	-43.2	-56.6
Non-Resident, Spring Turkey Permit	7,946	422	4,568.667	5,168.8	5,427.4	1782.9	73.9	53.7	46.4

Category	2021	2020	3-Year Avg.	5-Year Avg.	10-Year Avg.	% Change from 2020	% Change from 3-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 5-Yr. Avg.	% Change from 10-Yr. Avg.
Youth (Turkey Permit or Sportsman's License)	4,713	5,291	4,684.333	4,918.2	5,875.5	-10.9	0.6	-4.2	-19.8
All License Types	150,855	139,409	139,746.3	144,462	146,073.8	8.2	7.9	4.4	3.3

Figure 4. Annual License Sales (through end of spring turkey season)

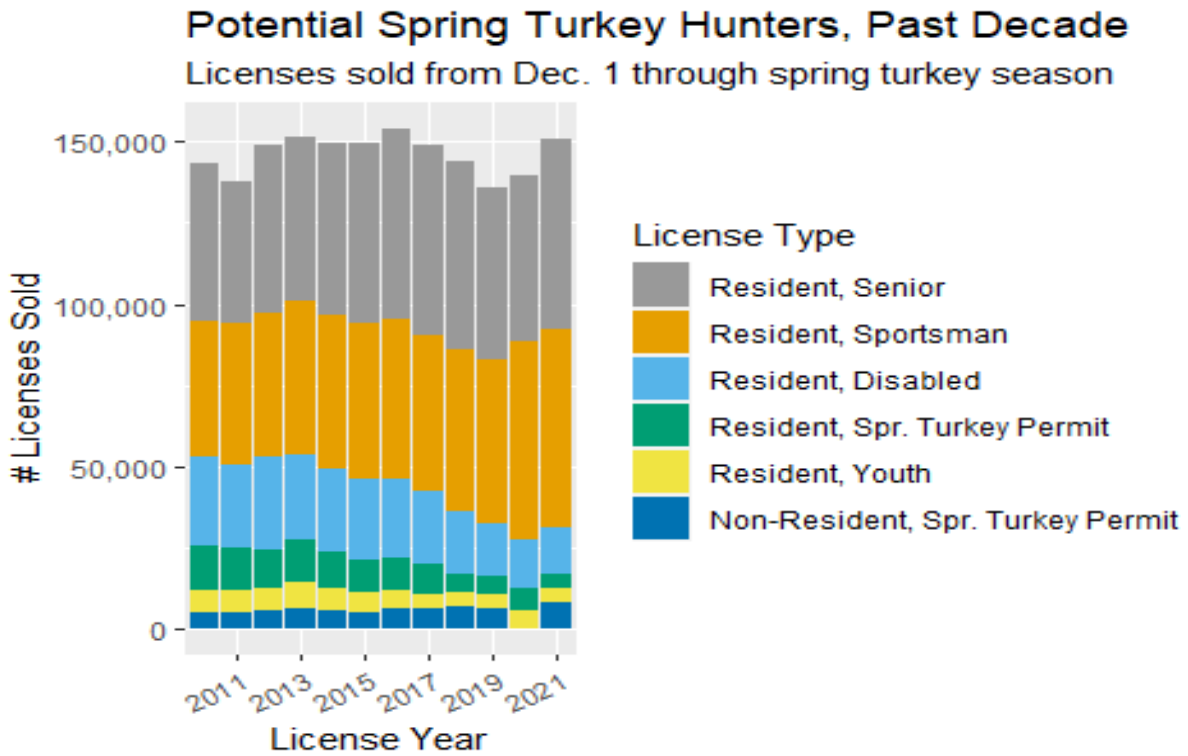


Figure 5. Annual trends in Poults Per Hen, an index of wild turkey reproduction from the Annual Brood Survey

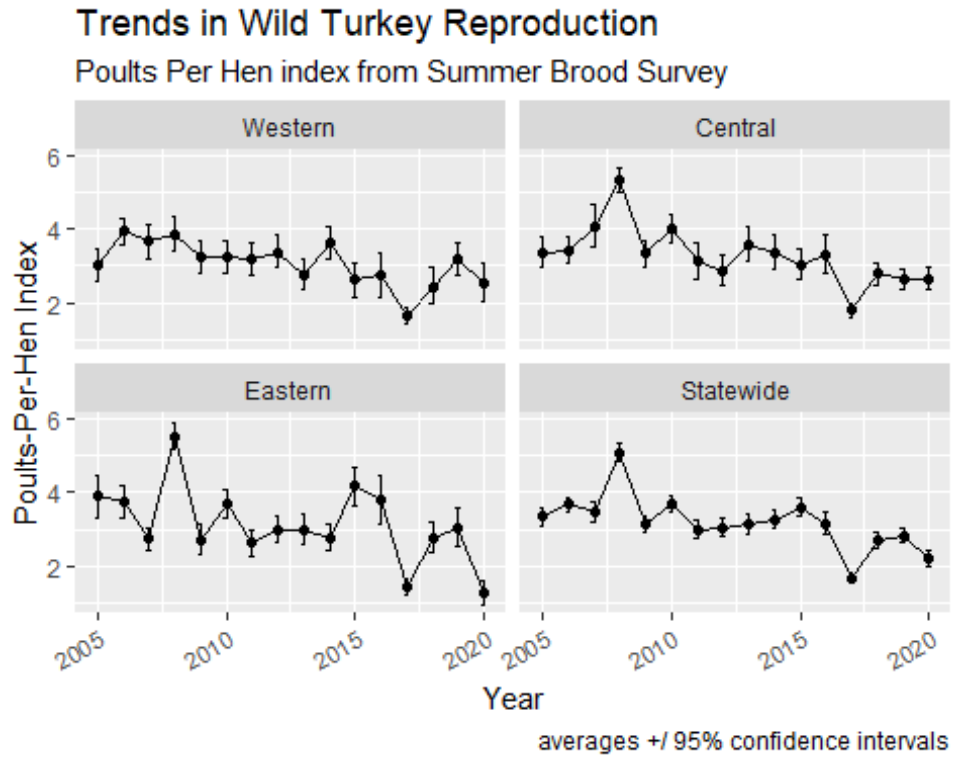


Figure 6. Annual Spring Turkey Harvest Relative to Annual License Sales

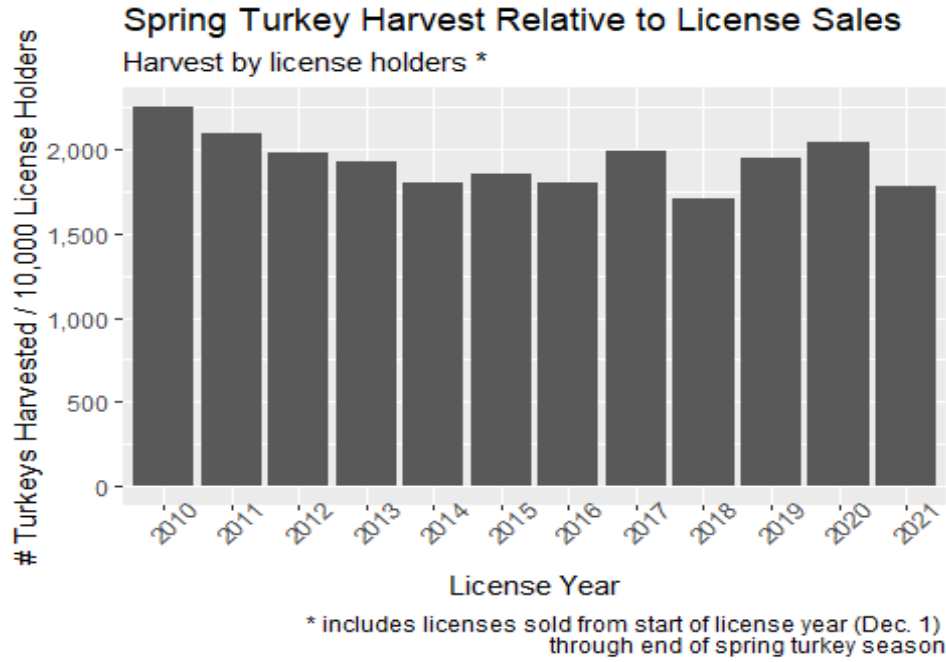


Figure 7. Hunter Effort: Days Hunted Per Turkey Harvested

