

2024-2025 Squirrel Report

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources



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Introduction

The Small Game Program is administered under the Wildlife Division of Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR). The KDFWR is an agency of the Kentucky Tourism, Arts & Heritage Cabinet. A nine-member commission that is nominated by Kentucky’s sportsmen and sportswomen oversees it. The Governor appoints commission members. The department employs about 450 full-time staff, which includes conservation officers, wildlife and fisheries biologists, conservation educators, information and technology, public relations, customer service, and administrative professionals.

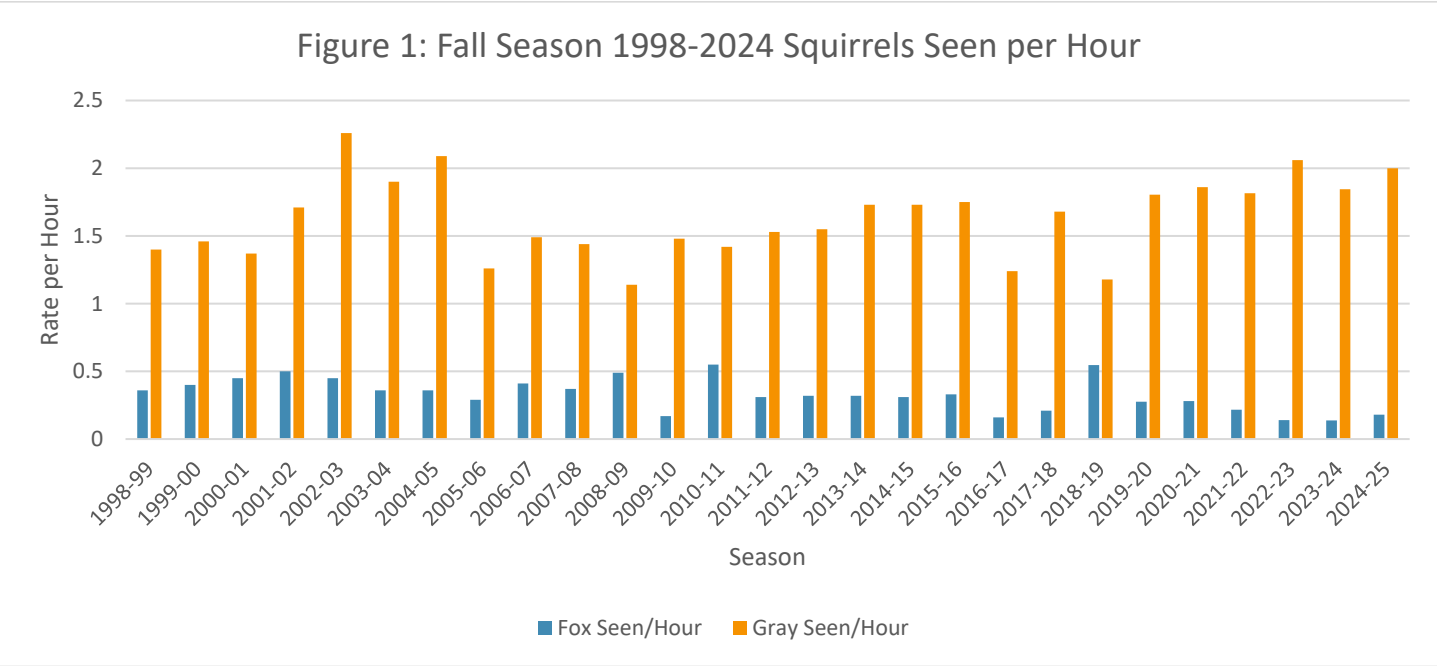
KDFWR receives no money from the state’s General Fund. Funding is provided by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, boating registration fees and federal funds, including grants based on the number of hunting and fishing licenses sold in the state.

The Small Game Program is tasked with managing squirrels (fox and gray), rabbits (swamp, eastern cottontail, and Appalachian cottontail), and northern bobwhite in the state to provide ample hunting opportunity while balancing the needs of consumptive and non-consumptive user groups. The Small Game Program is led by Cody M. Rhoden, Program Coordinator and supported by James Woods, Small Game Program Wildlife Biologist. Program staff are based out of the KDFWR Headquarters in Frankfort.

Population Status

The squirrel population in Kentucky is indexed as squirrels seen per hour afield hunting. These data are generated from hunter cooperator logs. The squirrel population in Kentucky appears to ebb and flow in

roughly 7-year cycles. We should expect a decline in the next few years based on this cyclic nature. Hunting season 2016 was a low point in this cycle, with the most recent hunting season (2024) remaining similar to the past 5 years. (Figure 1).



2024-2025 Squirrel Hunter Cooperator Survey

The squirrel survey was developed in 1995 as a voluntary initiative. Hunters are asked to record data including date of hunt, county hunted, hours hunted, number of hunters, number of dogs, and number of fox and gray squirrels (seen, killed, and wounded), on a diary-type hunting log. Logs are available on the internet: <http://fw.ky.gov/Hunt/Pages/Game-Species.aspx> or by calling 1-800-858-1549. Hunters simply keep the log up to date as the hunting season progresses and mail it to the KDFWR Headquarters when they are finished hunting for the season. Data collected from the survey gives the KDFWR information that can be used to monitor squirrel population trends in Kentucky and better serve the hunters of the state. Each year, participating hunter cooperators are mailed a new hunting log, the results of the survey, and a small gift. Hunters who wish to receive a copy of their log from the previous year may contact James Woods by calling (606) 207-6475 or by email at James.Woods@ky.gov

Past Squirrel Hunter Cooperator Surveys

Participation has been decreasing over the last several years, with a sharp decline in the 2016 hunting season (Table 1). The below map shows the number of hunts per county in the 2024 season (Figure 2). If you hunt any of the red counties, please consider filling out a hunting log this year (even if you do not harvest any game). Once again, do not forget to mail in your log and encourage other squirrel hunters to do the same. Also, why not take someone new hunting this year? The future of hunting depends on it!

Figure 2: Hunter cooperator logs reporting hunts from each county in Kentucky. Cooler colors equal more hunts per county and warmer colors equal less hunts per county.

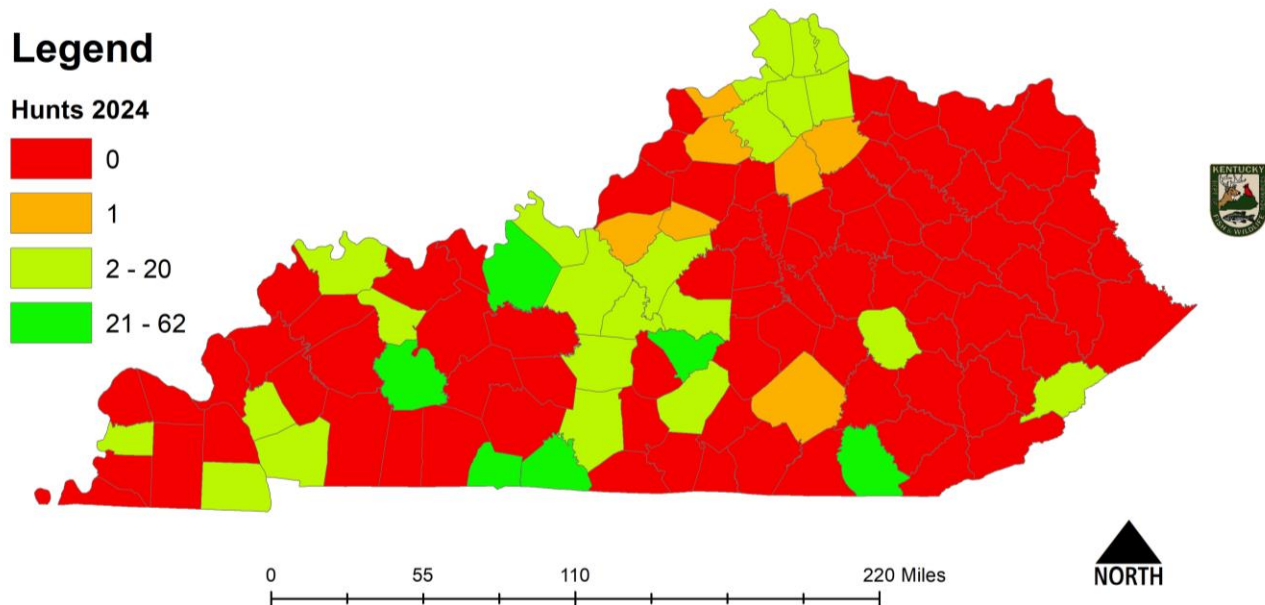


Table 1: Hunting statistics from past hunter cooperator surveys in Kentucky from the 2018 hunting season to present.

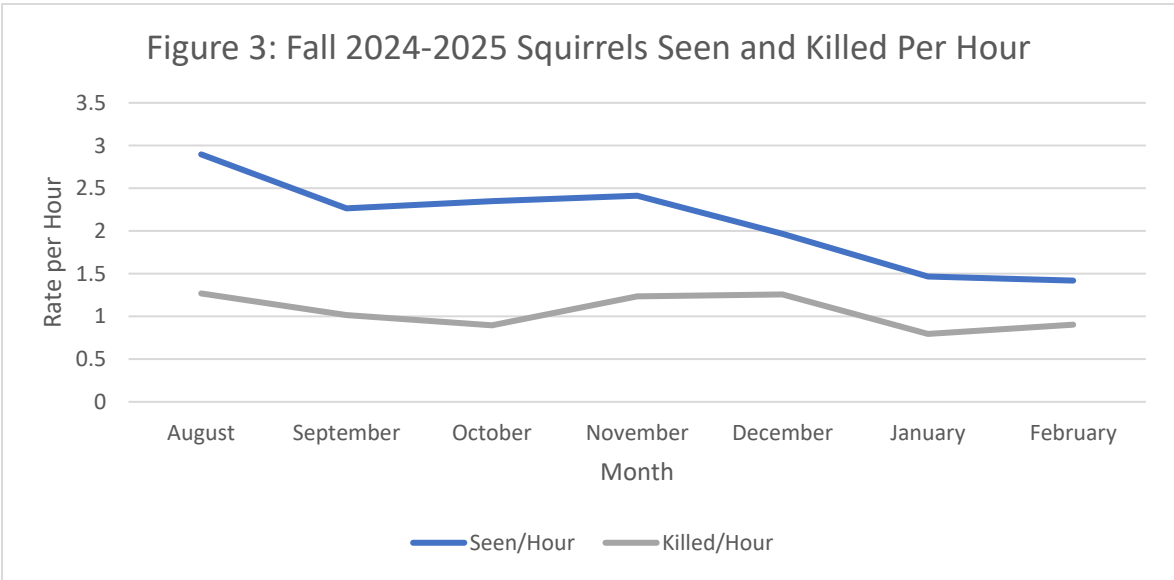
STATISTICS	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<i>Total cooperators</i>	76	58	41	36	23	21	24
<i>Total hunts</i>	910	679	472	391	331	288	382
<i>Total counties</i>	68	63	59	41	31	27	36
<i>Average hunts/cooperator</i>	13.4	10.8	11.5	10.9	10.7	13.1	19.7
<i>Total hours</i>	2478	1756	1183	902	832	780.65	851
<i>Hunts using dogs (%)</i>	36.3	28.7	24.7	28.6%	15.4%	15.6%	12.6%
<i>Total fox squirrels seen</i>	1373	408	327	195	114	107	168
<i>Total fox squirrels killed</i>	480	242	180	117	60	66	106
<i>Total fox squirrels wounded</i>	34	15	12	7	3	4	11
<i>Total gray squirrels seen</i>	2914	3351	2202	1637	1715	1440	1744
<i>Total gray squirrels killed</i>	1319	1444	1002	721	695	585	799
<i>Total gray squirrels wounded</i>	87	94	56	42	58	64	55
<i>Harvest of squirrels seen (%)</i>	42	44.9	46.7	45.7	44.6	42.0	47.3
<i>Squirrels wounded (%)</i>	2.82	2.9	2.7	2.9	3.3	4.4	3.4
<i>Hunting mortality (%)</i>	44.8	47.8	49.4	48.6	47.9	46.4	50.7

2024-25 Hunter Cooperator Results

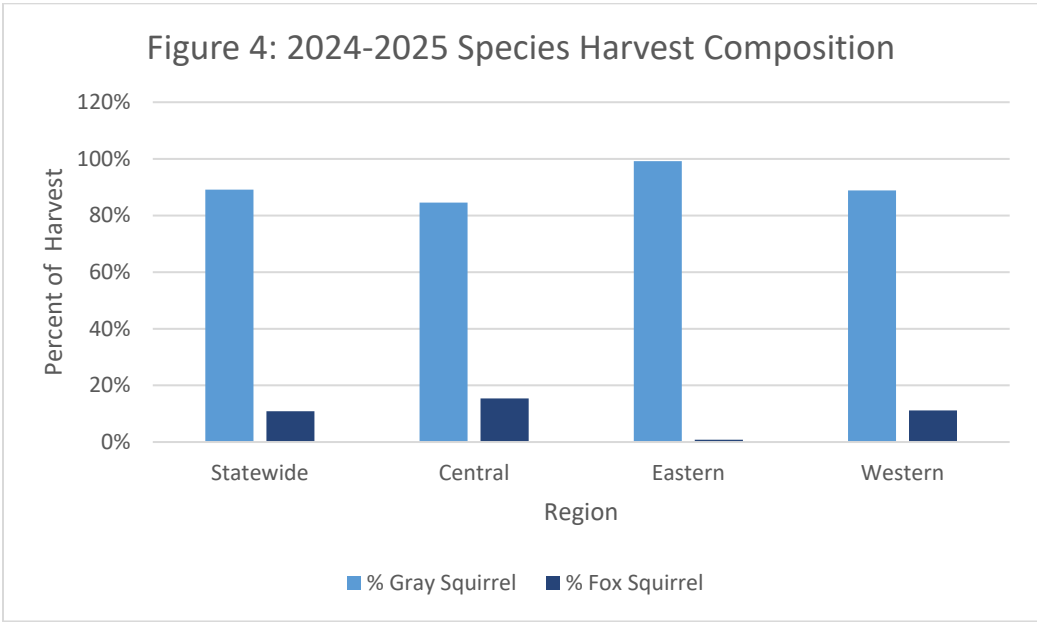
Logs were received from 23 squirrel hunters following the 2024 hunting season (a 9.5% increase from the 2023 season). Hunters averaged 19.7 hunting trips throughout the season. Twelve percent of squirrel hunters used dogs in their pursuit. Data were provided from 382 hunts from 36 counties, with good distribution across the Commonwealth (Figure 2). Hunters saw an average of 5.38 squirrels per **hunt** and an average of 2.24 squirrels per **hour**.

Harvest Statistics 2024-25

Hunters saw an average of 0.47 fox squirrels and 4.9 gray squirrels per **hunt** and harvested 0.29 fox squirrels and 2.25 gray squirrels per **hunt**. Hunters saw an average of 0.19 fox squirrels and 2 gray squirrels per **hour** hunted and harvested 0.12 fox squirrels and 0.93 gray squirrels per **hour** hunted. The number of squirrels **seen** and **harvested** per hour peaked in August. (Figure 3).



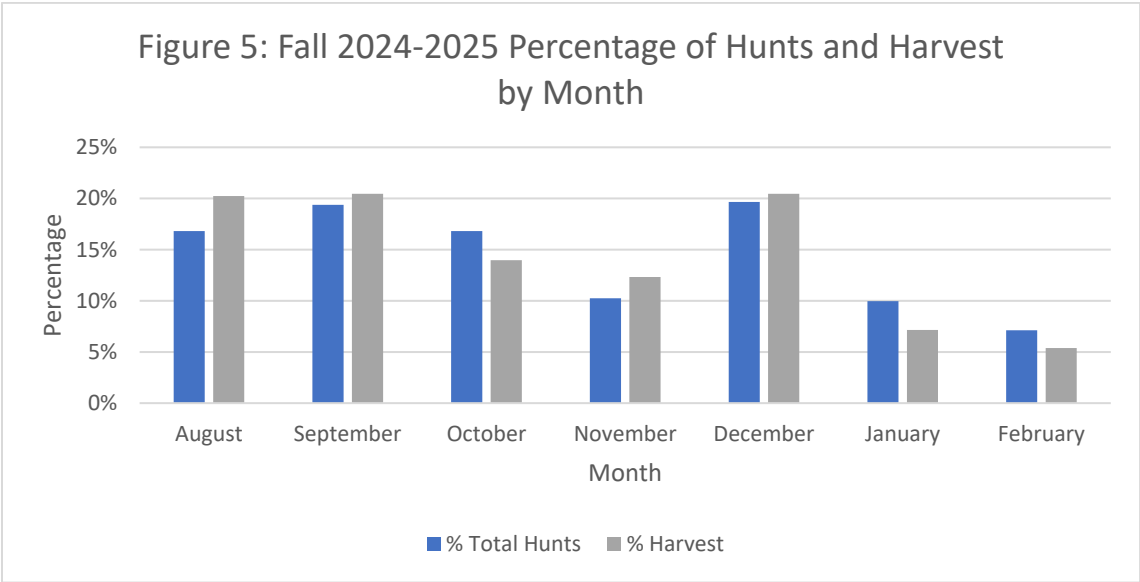
Hunters harvested 47.3% of squirrels seen and wounded 3.4%. Assuming wounded squirrels did not survive, the hunting mortality rate was 50.7% of squirrels seen in 2024-25. Statewide, 88% of the harvest was composed of gray squirrels (Figure 4). This rate suggests Kentucky squirrel hunters prefer hunting in more extensive forests and woodlands, as gray squirrels frequent this habitat, as opposed to fox squirrels which are found in more edge habitats such as small woodlands and fencerows. It also demonstrates gray squirrels are more abundant in Kentucky than fox squirrels. (Figure 1).



Hunter Effort

Hunting effort was greater towards the beginning of squirrel season. Fifty three percent of the hunts took place in August to October (Figure 5).

The hunter effort index declined through November, followed by a strong resurgence in hunting in December. Squirrel hunting is one of a few seasons open in August and September, and later season opening dates for deer, waterfowl, rabbit, grouse, and quail may account for the greater hunting effort taking place towards the beginning of squirrel season. Hunting pressure showed a decline in November, possibly due to the opening of deer firearm season.



Mast Survey

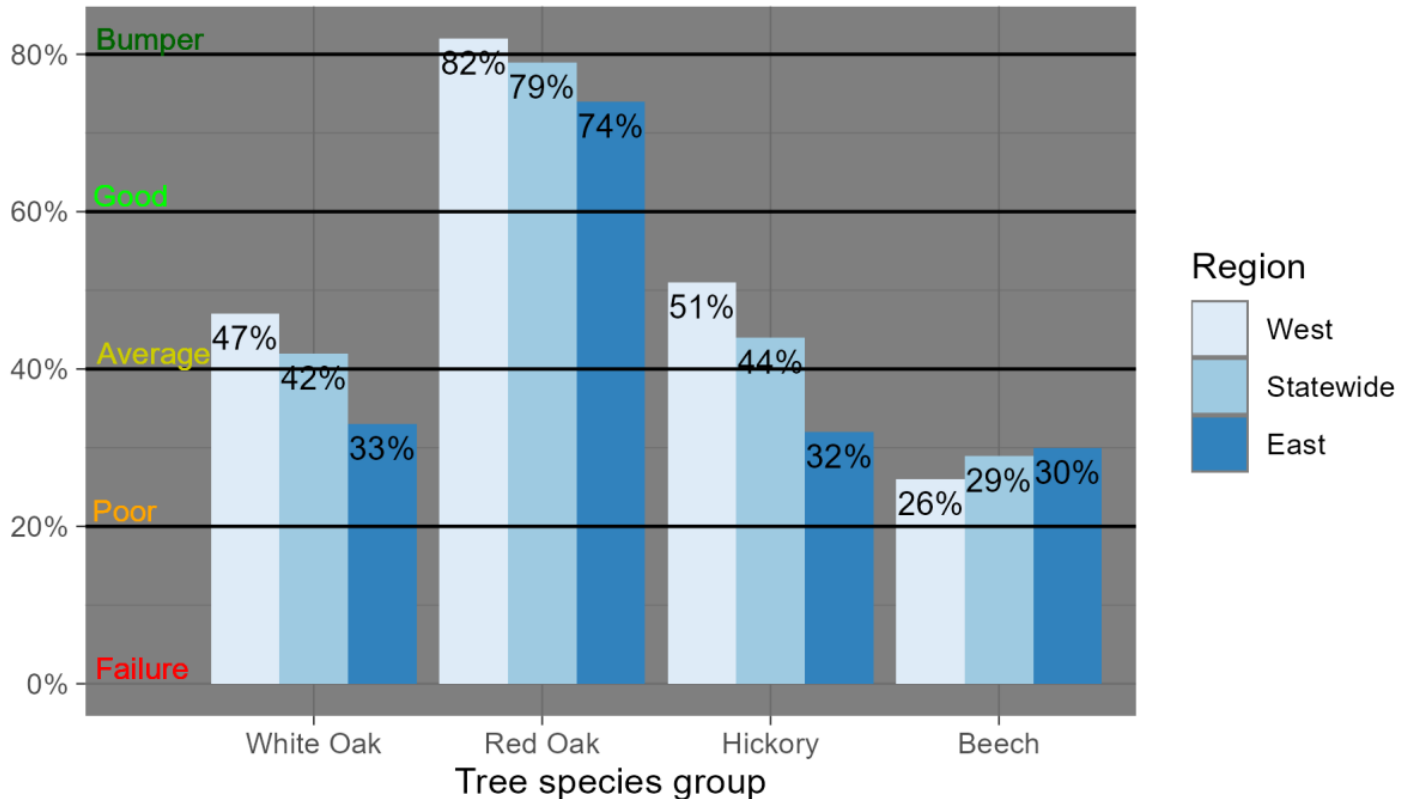
A statewide mast production survey of Kentucky's most important producers of wildlife foods was initiated in 1953 and has been conducted annually thereafter. A close relationship has been found between a given year's mast production and the following year's squirrel population level statewide. The mast survey looks at the 3 primary mast producing tree groups (hickories, red oaks, and white oaks) with American beech being the only individual species surveyed.

Figure 6 shows the proportion of trees bearing acorns (PBA) or other mast across Kentucky. As an example, 47% listed in the white oak (west) column means that for every white oak tree surveyed in Kentucky in 2024, an average of 47% of those trees contained acorns. Statewide, mast production rated Average for white oaks and hickory, Good (just shy of bumper) for red oaks, and Poor for beech (Figure 5, Figure 6). At eastern sites, mast production rated Poor for white oaks, hickory, and beech, and Good for red oaks. At western sites, mast production rated Average for white oaks and hickories, Bumper for red oaks, and Poor for beech.

The relatively high amounts of food in the forests in the fall usually results in a lower squirrel harvest in the following season. As more mast is locally available, fewer squirrels are moving around to find food resulting in a reduced chance for hunters to encounter them.

Figure 6: Percentage of trees bearing mast (PBA), 2024. This bar plot shows the distribution of PBA values when sampled trees are grouped by species group and survey region. PBA is presence or absence of mast derived from estimates of the percentage of tree crown area bearing any mast (PCA).

Percentage of Trees Bearing Any Mast (PBA)



Disease Surveillance

The KDFWR handles disease outbreaks for wildlife across the Commonwealth. There are currently no known disease issues for squirrels in the state. Disease is a natural component of all healthy ecosystems. Some common disease issues that could threaten squirrels in Kentucky include tularemia, mange, and squirrel pox. The Small Game Program did not test any animals for disease in the 2024 season.

Protecting yourself and your pets from diseases such as these includes wearing long pants and sleeves, utilizing bug repellent on clothes (permethrin) and exposed skin (DEET), treating pets with flea and tick control medication, and wearing gloves when processing game. Generally speaking, it is very rare for sportspeople to contract the common diseases of any given wildlife; however, utilizing some of the practices listed above may decrease your risk while afield this year.

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources encourages hunters who encounter wildlife acting strangely or that look sick to contact The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife at 1-800-858-1549

General Information about the 2025-26 Season

License and Permit Fees

License	Resident	Nonresident
Annual Hunting License	\$27	\$160
Senior/Disabled License	\$12	N/A
Sportsman's License	\$95	N/A
Youth Sportsman's License	\$30	N/A
Annual Trapping License	\$20	\$130
Annual Youth Trapping	\$5	N/A

Season Dates and Bag Limits

Season	Statewide Season Dates	Statewide Bag Limit
Fall Season	August 16 – November 7 and November 10, 2025 – February 28, 2026	6
Spring Season	May 16 – June 21, 2026	6
Trapping Season	November 10, 2025 – February 28, 2026	6

Outlook for the 2025-2026 Squirrel Season

Last year, hunters saw an average of 2.24 squirrels per hour. This was more than the previous seasons 1.8 squirrels seen per hour. We saw a variety of temperatures and precipitation through the winter, but we expect to see a good year in the 2025-26 hunting season.

Don't forget to turn in your Hunter Cooperator log at the completion of this year's hunt. Logs should be returned no later than June 30, 2026. In return, we will send you a report and a small gift as a token of our appreciation.

Encourage all your friends to log their hunts as well. Have a safe and enjoyable squirrel season and thanks again for your support! Don't forget to take someone new to hunting out with you this year.

Contacts

Approximately 93% of Kentucky is privately owned. To successfully manage our wildlife resources, the KDFWR works cooperatively with Kentucky's private landowners. One of the essential ingredients in conserving Kentucky's wildlife resources is habitat improvement. Wildlife biologists are available to work with interested individuals or groups on properties that they own or have management rights on. Please contact the Private Lands Program Coordinator, Jacob Stewart, jacob.stewart@ky.gov or 502-892-4412, or find your **Private Lands Biologist** by searching your county on our website (<https://app.fw.ky.gov/WebContact/>). Thank you!

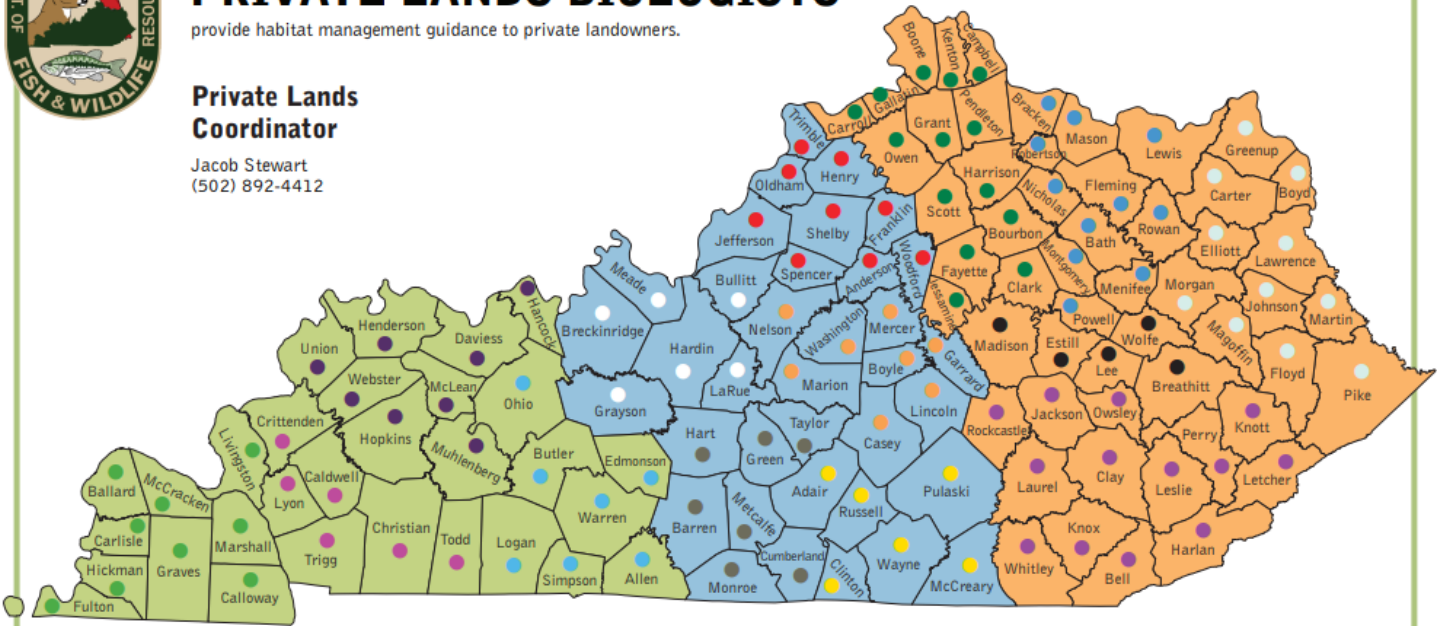


PRIVATE LANDS BIOLOGISTS

provide habitat management guidance to private landowners.

Private Lands Coordinator

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