

Spring Gobbler Bag Limits in South Carolina

- The current statewide bag limit is 5 gobblers in South Carolina.
- Eleven (11) counties in the midlands and Pee Dee have a 2 bird limit.
- Only one other state (Alabama) has a 5 bird limit. Most states have a 2 bird limit.
- DNR Wildlife Section biological staff has long been concerned with the 5 bird limit.
- The turkey population has declined in most regions of the state in recent years.
- Reproduction in wild turkeys has decreased over time (see Figure 1).
- The annual spring turkey harvest has decreased 34 percent since 2002 (see Figure 2).
- The number of turkey hunters has increased over time (see Figure 3).
- DNR staff recommended a 3 bird bag limit in May of 2008.
- A reduction in the bag limit should increase annual carryover of gobblers.
- A reduction in the bag limit should increase reproduction in turkeys.
- A reduction in the bag limit should more equitably distribute harvest opportunities among all hunters.
- Only about 3 percent of hunters take more than 3 birds annually.
- However, this 3 percent of hunters takes about 23 percent of all birds annually with about 11 percent of the total harvest being made up of the fourth and fifth bird.
- Most hunters have noted the decline in turkeys in recent years.
- Indications are that most hunters question the appropriateness of the 5 bird limit and would support a reduction in the bag limit.

Figure 1. Summer wild turkey recruitment ratio in South Carolina 1982-2009. Note declining trend since 1988 and very poor recruitment ratio 7 out of the last 8 years. Average recruitment prior to 1989 = 3.5. Average recruitment since 1989 = 2.3. This represents a 34 percent decrease. Recruitment ratio is a measure of young entering the population based on the number of hens in the population.

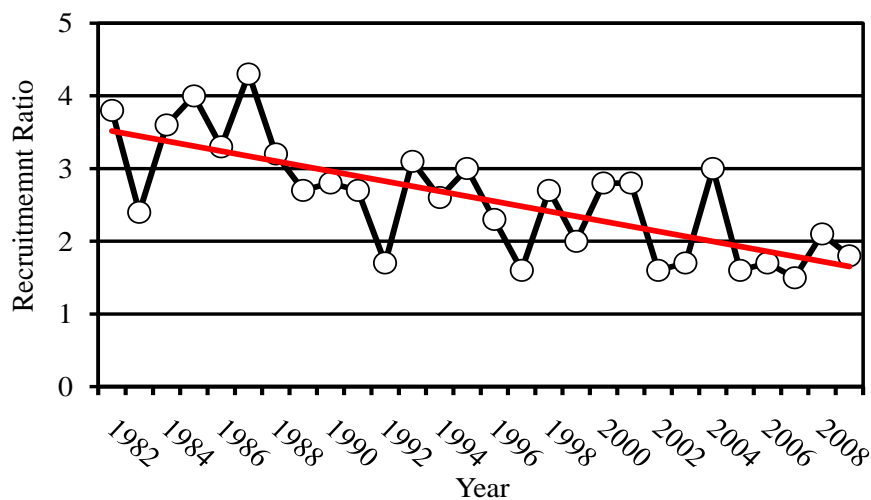


Figure 2. Spring wild turkey harvest in South Carolina 1982-2009. Note that harvest increased between 1982 and 2002 as a result of increasing turkey population following restoration efforts. However, harvest has declined 34 percent since 2002 following years of poor recruitment.

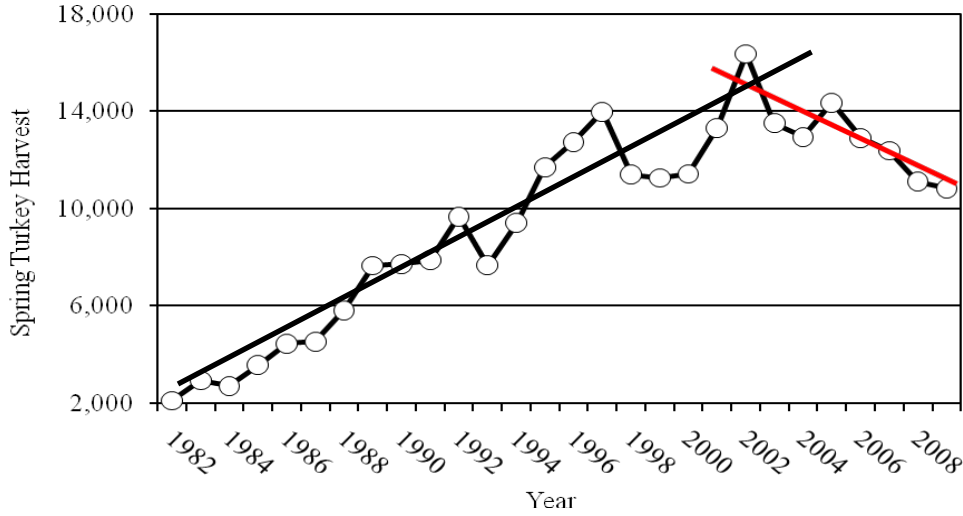


Figure 3. Number of turkey hunters in South Carolina 1982-2009. Note increasing trend throughout period. There are approximately 34 percent more turkey hunters today than in 1995.

