

2025 Virginia Spring Gobbler Survey Report

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Since 1987 the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) has sought the assistance of avid spring gobbler hunters to participate in this long-term survey that provides important information for the Department's wild turkey management program. Although the survey has changed a bit over the years, DWR continues to gain a tremendous amount of information regarding hunter effort, populations, and more. The data collected and reported in this survey would not be possible without the voluntary contributions from our dedicated turkey hunters.

Last season (2025) marked the first year of moving towards a digital platform. Although we continue to offer a standard form, over the next few years we will likely move towards an all-digital survey in an effort to stretch conservation dollars as far as possible. We realize that our data collection tools are not perfect, and we are working to make them as user-friendly as possible. As with all changes of this nature, this may take a few years to get it where we want it, so we do ask for a bit of patience as we attempt to improve the program.

Results and Discussion

The number of survey cooperators in 2025 (172) decreased slightly from last year (207), likely due to changes in mail vs email offerings. Cooperators in the 2025 survey submitted information on 1,790 hunts, down considerably from the 2,323 hunts reported in 2024. The geographic distribution of survey respondents was good, as reports were submitted from 87 counties and cities.

Hunter Effort

One of the biggest drivers of success is hunter effort. This is a metric that is very challenging for DWR to monitor through license sales or other metrics and is one of the biggest benefits of this survey. Effort data allows us to see how the number of hours hunted are reflected in the harvest or gobbling data. It is one thing to note increases or decreases in harvest, but without understanding how much effort goes into each harvest, it is challenging for biologists to make adequate inferences into these data. The number of hunting hours are heavily front loaded in our spring season, with approximately 58% of the hours being spent in the first 14 days of the regular season (Fig. 1). As expected, Saturdays make up approximately 25% of the hunter hours, followed by Sunday with 19% of the hunter hours. Collectively, weekends account for 44% of the hunter hours, while only making up 34% of the season (including youth weekend).

Over the past several years, hunters are reporting seeing and hearing more other hunters in the woods prompting concerns of increasing hunter pressure. While this survey cannot address the overall question of an increase in hunter numbers, it may provide clues to address the question of hunting pressure. Over the past several years, hunters have reported fewer hunting trips (10.4 trips per cooperator in 2025) which is a decrease from the high in 2020 of 12.6 trips per hunter (Fig. 2). Those hunters are reporting that they are hunting longer however, with the average hunting trip lasting 3.92 hours, up from 3.7 hours in 2018 (Fig. 2). While these minor changes are unlikely to be felt by hunters, they do represent slight changes in hunter behavior.

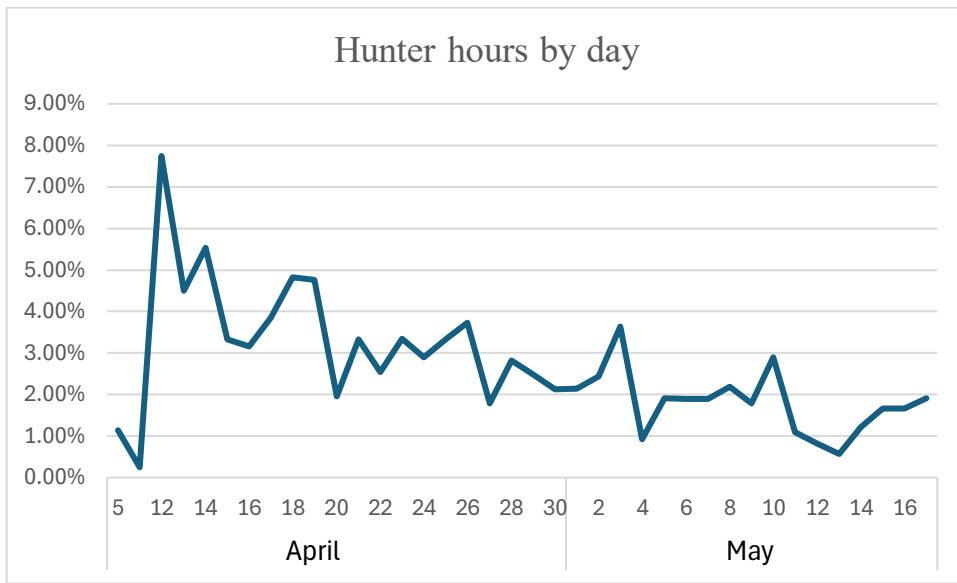


Figure 1. Hunter hours as reported through the Spring Gobbler Survey in the 2025 hunting season.

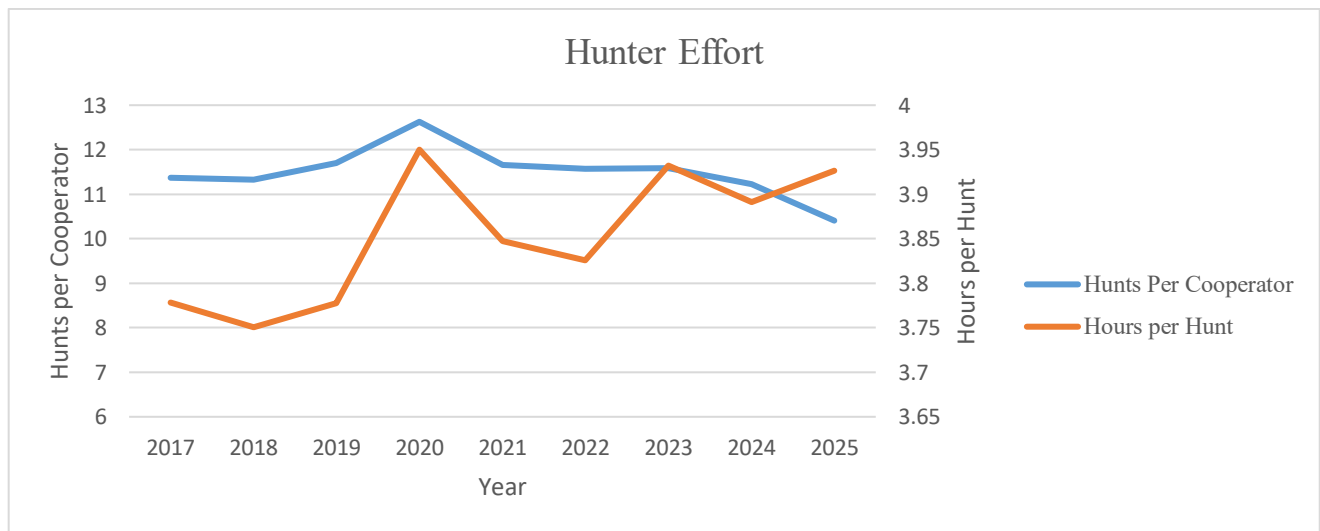


Figure 2. Hunter effort as measured by the number of hunts per cooperater and the hours per hunt from hunters contributing to the Spring Gobbler Survey from 2017-2025.

Statewide Gobbling Rates

Gobbling rates are calculated as the number of gobblers heard divided by the total hours hunted. This provides a basic index of gobbling activity. Although gobbling activity directly affects hunter success, the relationship between gobbling and the overall population is somewhat nuanced. Certainly, hearing more gobblers may indicate a larger population; however, gobbling is affected by weather, hunting pressure, and even the condition of the turkey going into the breeding season. Gobbling rates have remained relatively consistent over the past ten years (2016-2025), with spikes noted in 2017 and 2023 (record harvest). The gobbling rate in 2025 (0.37 gobblers per hour) was down from the past few years and was slightly below the 10-

year average of 0.44 gobblers per hour. While there may be a slight downward trend over the past decade, the trend is not statistically significant, due primarily to the variability of the data.

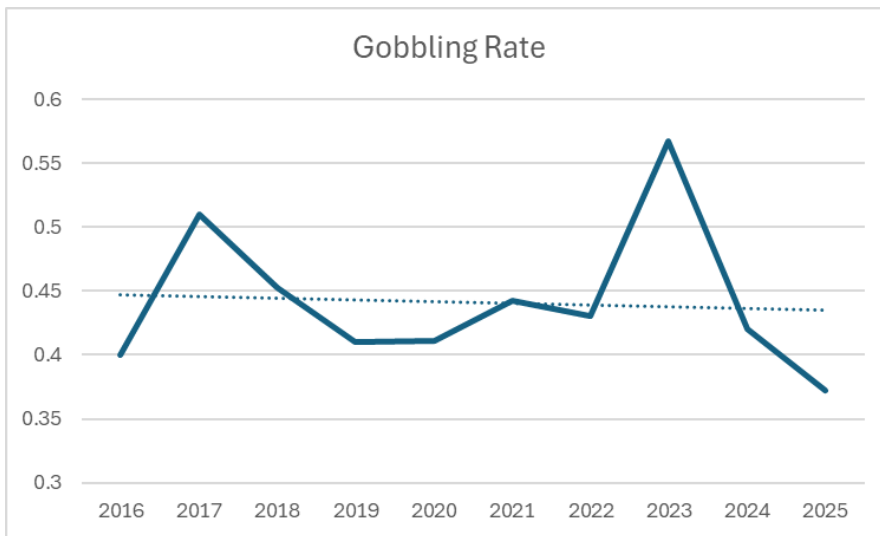


Figure 3. The gobbling rate (number of gobblers heard per hour of hunting) for Virginia’s Spring Gobbler Survey participants from 2016-2025.

Statewide Harvest Rates

The average harvest rate defined as the number of birds killed by reporting cooperators per 100 hours (2.24) declined slightly from the 2024 season but remained above the 10-year average of 2.2 turkeys harvested per 100 hours (Fig. 4). The harvest reported through the survey is relatively consistent with the trends noted in harvest through the DWR reporting system. Research has shown that harvest rate is generally reflective of population size, however it is important to note that variations in hunting pressure, hunter effectiveness, and other metrics may be affecting these indices at greater rates than predicted.

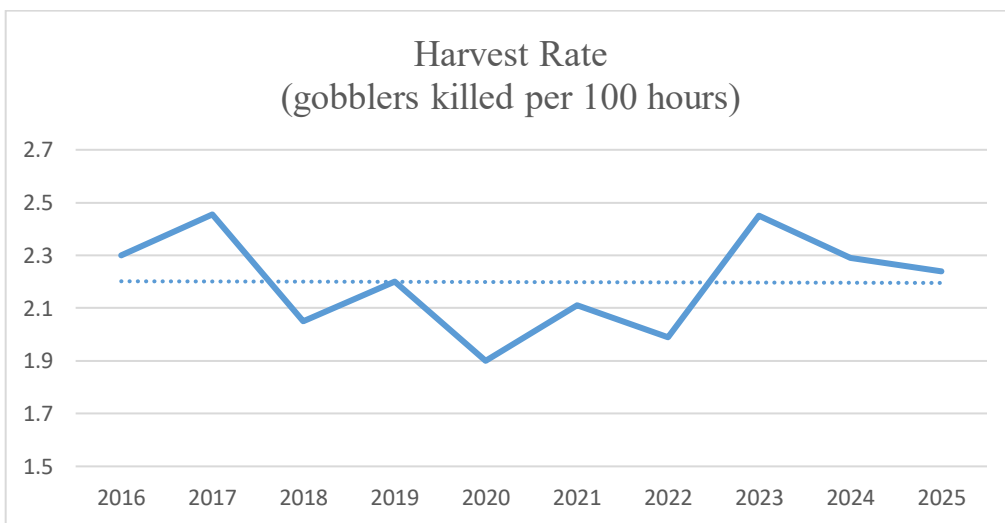


Figure 4. The harvest rate of gobblers reported by cooperating hunters through the Spring Gobbler Survey in Virginia from 2016-2025.

Gobbling and Harvest Rates by Week and Day

The gobbling rate was highest early in the season, decreasing through the season (Fig. 5). Gobbling steadily declines as turkeys are being removed through harvest, birds become more sensitive to hunting pressure and as the breeding season begins to conclude. Although many hunters believe gobbling ends early in the season, these data suggest that gobbling remains high through April before slipping a bit in May.

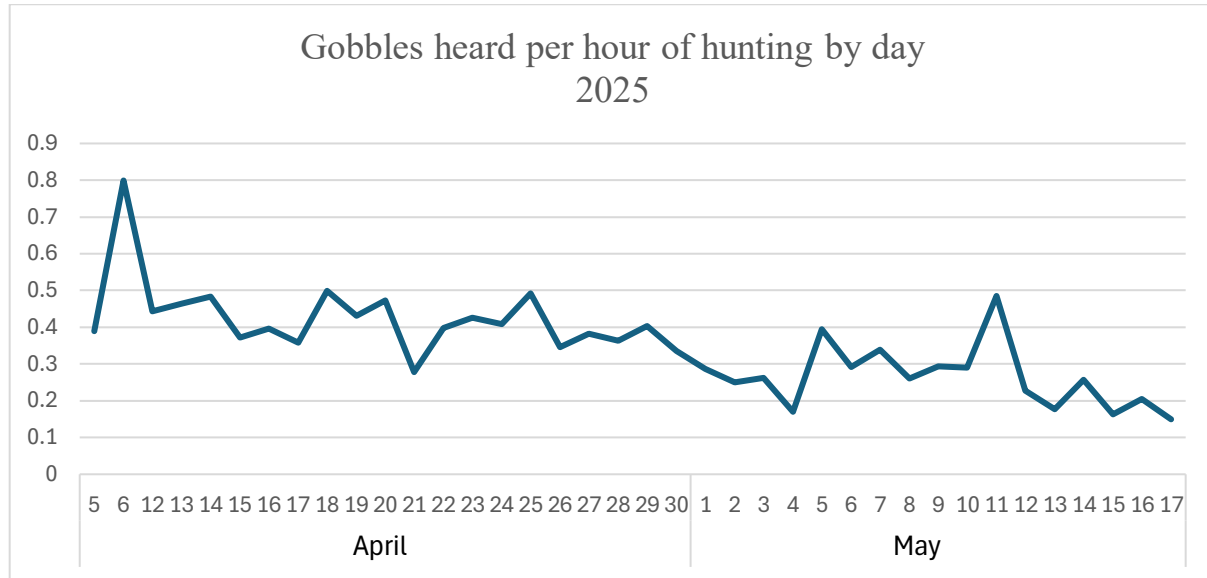


Figure 5. Gobbling rates (gobbles per hour hunted) as reported through the Virginia Spring Gobbler Survey for the 2025 hunting season.

Gobbling and Harvest Rates by Region

Table 1. Statewide gobbling (gobbles/hour) and harvest rates (kill/100 hours) in Virginia from 2022-2025.

Year	Gobbling/Hour	Kill/100 Hours
2022	0.431	2.05
2023	0.567	2.45
2024	0.42	2.29
2025	0.372	2.24
10-Year Average	0.442	2.2

Table 2. Gobbling and harvest rates by region of the state since 2023.

Year	Gobbling Rate (heard/hour)		Harvest Rate (killed/100 hours)	
	EBR	WBR	EBR	WBR
2023	0.598	0.528	2.80	2.00
2024	0.424	0.417	2.45	2.06
2025	0.358	0.401	2.13	2.51
Average	0.451	0.447	2.33	2.20

For this report, six physiographic regions were used to investigate estimates at smaller spatial scales (Fig. 6). The Gobbling and Harvest rates for these regions can be seen in Figure 7 and 8.

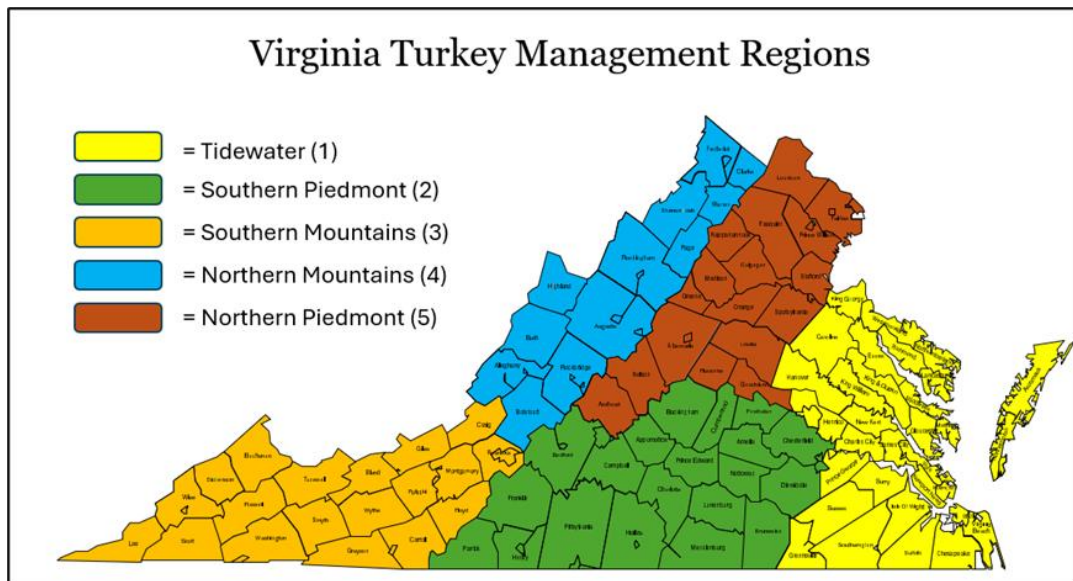


Figure 6. Turkey Management Regions for Virginia.

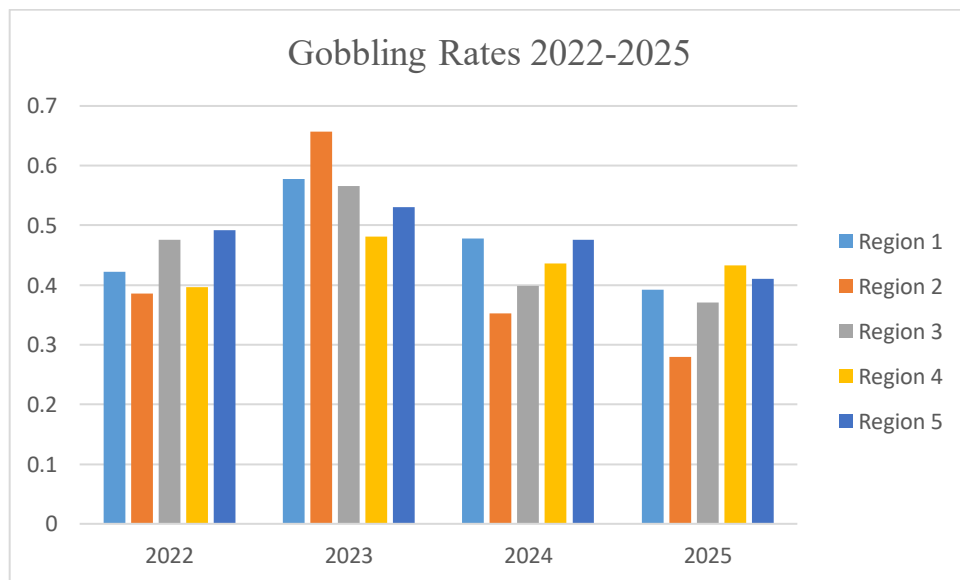


Figure 7. Gobbling rates for Virginia's turkey management regions since 2022.

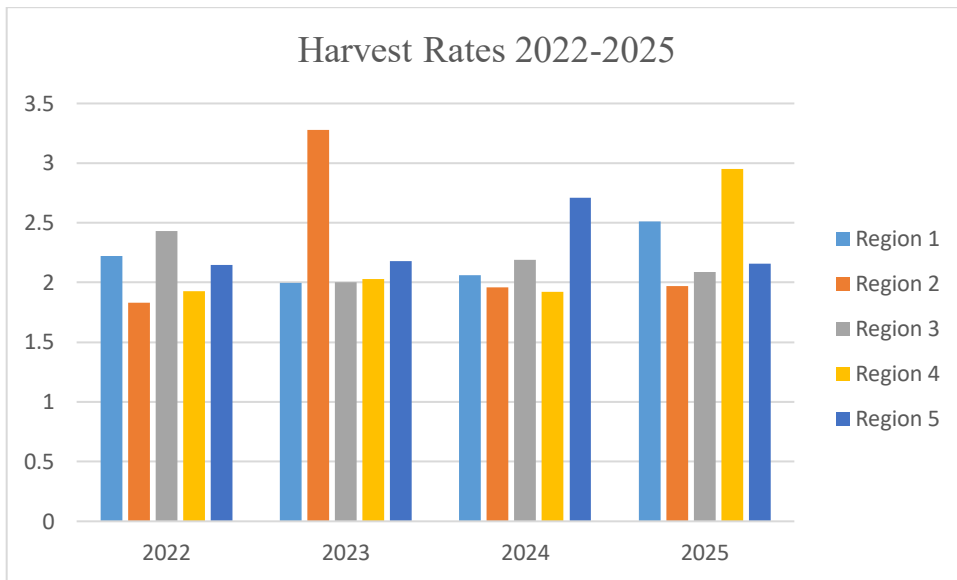


Figure 8. Harvest rates for Virginia’s turkey management regions since 2022.

Gobbling Intensity

Gobbling intensity was grouped into three categories (No Gobbling, Roost/Poor, or Fair-Good). Throughout the 2025 season, more than 40% of hunts were reported as Roost/Poor, 26% were rated as Fair-Good, and 34% of hunts ended with no gobbling. This distribution is similar to 2024 where 42% of the hunts reported gobbling only on the roost or poor, 26% as fair or good, and 31% of the hunts had no gobbling.

Cooperator Profile

Cooperators averaged 41 hours of hunting throughout the season, hearing 2,615 gobblers for an average of 15 gobblers heard per hunter. Twenty percent of birds heard were “Called In”, while only 8% of those birds heard gobbling were killed by the hunter or a partner. The cooperator or their partner killed 42 percent of birds that were “Called In” and 8% of those birds that were “called in” were missed or crippled. Essentially 50% of birds that were called in escaped unscathed (could be due to hunter’s choice not to take a bird or no ethical shot presented). Cooperators primarily reported hunts on private lands (85%) with only 15% of hunts being recorded on public lands (11% on federal and 4% on state).