

# FEASIBILITY STATEMENTS FOR WILD TURKEY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Goal: Increase the size and distribution of the Wild Turkey population within all suitable habitats in Maine.**

**Objective 1: By 2010, increase the size and distribution of the Wild Turkey population within all suitable habitats in Maine via trap and transfer activities and habitat improvements.**

Desirability: An increase in the Wild Turkey population within all suitable Wild Turkey habitats in Maine would be desirable to both consumptive and non-consumptive users of the Wild Turkey resource.

Feasibility: Wild Turkey populations are characterized by both short term and long term fluctuations related to unpredictable variation in nesting success and poult survival and, in northern ranges, winter mortality. Other limiting factors include predation, loss of habitat, and hunter harvest. With this being said, it remains feasible to improve Wild Turkey populations and distribution with an aggressive trap and transfer program and through habitat improvements. Given existing Department staff time limitations, it is feasible to assume that, on average, two new sites per winter in suitable habitat could be stocked. Wild Turkey population expansion could be expedited with additional resources and staff.

Capability of Habitat: The availability of Wild Turkey habitat currently without turkeys varies considerably throughout the state. Wildlife Management Districts (WMDs) 1-11, 14, 19, and 28-30 are considered to have little or no potential Wild Turkey habitat due to low amounts of agriculture, low acreage's of mast-producing trees, and/or high annual snow depths. WMDs 12, 13, and portions of 17, 18 and 27 have potential Wild Turkey habitat based on association with favorable agricultural practices. Habitat in these WMDs is considered the best potential for increasing turkey populations beyond current populations through both natural population expansion and trap and transfer activities.

Possible Consequences: An increase in the Wild Turkey population in some areas will likely result in an increase in nuisance complaints and potential for some damage to agricultural crops.

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**Objective 2: By 2010, provide unlimited spring hunting opportunity (everyone who applies for a permit receives a permit) as long as the Wild Turkey population can support it and 2001 hunt quality is maintained. (The working group defined quality hunting as hearing, seeing, working, and hopefully harvesting a turkey without interference from others.)**

Desirability: Because approximately 15,000 individuals applied for turkey hunting permit in 2000 and only 4,000 were available, it is logical to assume that unlimited entry into the spring hunt would be desirable to at least the hunting public. However, we also receive comments that suggest that the number of permits issued remain conservative to preserve the quality of the hunt.

Feasibility: Only bearded turkeys can legally be taken during the spring hunting season, thus most biologists agree that, when regulated properly, spring hunting is not detrimental to Wild Turkey populations. Therefore, biologically it is feasible to assume that more spring hunting opportunity and additional harvests are allowable. Further, while most hunters appear satisfied with current Wild Turkey hunting regulations (to date, the Department has no measure of this), an issue that wildlife managers face is how to best balance people's desire to hunt or view Wild Turkeys and maintain high quality hunting experiences and good landowner relations. Additional efforts in hunter education and landowner relations will be necessary before unlimited hunting opportunity is realized. Expanded hunting areas and additional hunters will create an added burden on Department staff during the administration of the annual hunt.

Capability of Habitat: Currently an estimated 5,300 square miles of habitat in Maine support Wild Turkeys, enough habitat to support this objective.

Possible Consequences: Unlimited spring hunting opportunity raises the issue of how to balance the hunting public's desire to hunt turkeys with the desire to maintain a high quality hunting experience. Based on data received in 2000, nearly 15,000 individuals desire to hunt turkeys in Maine. This increase in hunter numbers may result in more frequent instances of hunter interference, hunter dissatisfaction, increased potential for illegal harvest of hens, increased potential for hunting accidents, and landowner conflicts, including land posting. Expanded hunting areas and an increase in hunters will create an additional burden on Department staff during the administration of the annual hunt.

**Objective 3: By 2002, develop a component to the Department's Nuisance Wildlife Policy that addresses Wild Turkeys.**

Desirability and Feasibility: The development of nuisance policy statements and guidelines for Wild Turkeys, within the framework of the Department's Administrative Policy Regarding Nuisance Wildlife, is both feasible and desirable.

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Capability of Habitat: Not applicable.

Possible Consequences: The development of nuisance policy statements and guidelines for Wild Turkeys, within the framework of the Department's Administrative Policy Regarding Nuisance Wildlife would facilitate Department response regarding nuisance turkey complaints.

### **Objective 4: By 2003, implement a limited fall hunting season in areas where the Wild Turkey population can support it, and without adversely affecting Objective 2.**

Desirability: The original (1985) Wild Turkey Assessment and Management System included a harvest objective describing a fall archery hunt "as Wild Turkey populations expanded and demand increased". Wild Turkey populations have expanded and demand has increased, particularly in the late 1990s. The Department has been requested to consider a fall either-sex archery hunt by the State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation. Increased Wild Turkey hunting opportunity may be desirable as limited fall hunts, where hens could legally be taken in areas where the Wild Turkey population can support it, and where it would most likely have little effect on the overall Wild Turkey population.

Feasibility: A limited fall, either-sex hunting season is feasible in areas where the Wild Turkey population can support it. Some northeastern states regulate fall hunter numbers with a permit system and others do not. Some states limit the fall harvest by limiting hunters to archery gear. More information as to what type of fall hunting opportunity (limited number of permits, restrictions in gear, "where population can support it", etc.) is needed to fully address this feasibility issue.

Capability of Habitat: The Wild Turkey population in the highest quality Wild Turkey habitat in Maine, where current populations are the highest and nuisance complaints are most frequent, can likely support additional hunting mortality in the fall.

Possible Consequences: Some criticism of expanded use-opportunity may result from concerns of excessive hunting pressure and potential for landowner conflicts in the fall.

### **Objective 5: Develop a cooperative habitat improvement program between landowners, the Maine Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the Department.**

Desirability and Feasibility: A habitat improvement program between landowners, the Maine Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, {the National Wild Turkey Federation - Habitat Enhancement Land Program}, and the Department is both feasible and desirable. Planting appropriate species will improve habitat not only for

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Wild Turkeys but many other wildlife species as well. Currently, staffing levels and lack of funds are an impediment to additional work in this area.

Capability of Habitat: Habitat conditions for Wild Turkeys can be enhanced through a variety of herbaceous, shrub, and tree planting and land management activities (i.e., managing opening and spring seeps for Wild Turkeys).

Possible Consequences: Department staff time for additional responsibilities in this area is limited.