



Translocation of problem wild turkeys from British Columbia into Alberta

Alberta Conservation Association, September 2022

Background

Wild turkeys were first introduced into Alberta in 1962 when 21 turkeys from South Dakota were translocated to the Cypress Hills (GoA 2022). Translocations later occurred in areas through southwestern Alberta including Beaver Mines, Crowsnest Pass, Lee Lake, Porcupine Hills, Todd Creek, and Turner Valley. While some populations persist in these areas today, numbers have recently decreased, particularly within the Porcupine Hills. Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) estimates that the population is near 1,000 wild turkeys in southwestern Alberta.

Purpose

The purpose of this initiative is to augment wild turkey populations in Alberta through the translocation of individuals captured in the province of British Columbia (BC) where concerns with human/wildlife conflict have occurred. The number of birds to be captured and the suitability of capture sites will be advised by local area wildlife biologist(s) in BC. ACA proposes to 1) assist with the management of conflict/problem birds in BC by conducting the captures and covering the costs associated with translocating turkeys to Alberta, and 2) establish and/or enhance wild turkey populations in areas with suitable habitat in Alberta.

Overview

ACA proposes to capture wild turkeys in locations identified by BC wildlife biologists during the winter (December–March). Capture efforts are intended to focus on surplus and potentially problematic turkeys. We welcome the possibility of capturing and translocating wild turkeys annually for up to 10 years. This will ideally reduce human/wildlife conflict with problem turkeys within BC while also enhancing the population within Alberta. We propose to initiate captures in the winter of 2022/23 with 100–200 birds.

Trap Design and Capture Technique

We intend to use a walk-in box trap design. The trap design has been successfully used for over 10 years by the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTFF; Joe Foster, pers. comm., Idaho, USA, 2022). The trap measures 8' x 16' and is constructed of 4' x 8' galvanized mesh (4" x 4") fence panels that are easy to transport and handle. The trap is pre-baited with clean (weed-free) corn, barley, and/or wheat to draw turkeys into the trap, commonly 1–4 days prior to a capture event. This acclimatizes birds to the bait and

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trap structure as they enter and depart from both ends. The trap will be set in proximity to known feeding/roosting site(s) and will be monitored daily in person and with cellular trail cameras.

We have trialed this trap setup in southwestern Alberta in winter 2022 resulting in the translocation of 22 wild turkeys. This trap proved to be simple, efficient, and relatively discreet that would be well-suited to use in an urban setting.



Images of southwestern Alberta 2022 capture and releases.

Traps will be set (ends now closed with a funnel opening only) approximately one hour before sunrise, when turkeys are known to depart roosts and make their way to feeding sites. Turkeys enter the trap through a funnel that limits their ability to exit by the same route. Once a target number have entered the trap, the funnel will be manually blocked. Two team members will then enter the trap and capture and process one turkey at a time. One team member will use a long-handled poultry hook to sweep the feet and pull the turkey in, then will restrain, and hold the bird with both arms. The second member will attach an identification leg band and confirm the bird's sex. While being restrained, the bird will be swabbed by a veterinarian or trained staff to be tested for avian influenza, mycoplasma, and salmonella. While still in the trap, turkeys will be placed into purpose-built turkey transport boxes, and then removed from the trap and placed into an enclosed trailer or canopied truck.

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Turkeys will be transported to a predetermined holding facility until results from disease screening tests are obtained (approximately 3 days). Once cleared of potential disease, the birds will be recaptured in a similar fashion and returned to boxes for transport. At the discretion of the BC wildlife veterinarian, any individuals testing positive for avian influenza, mycoplasma, or salmonella will be euthanized and incinerated.

Once trapping is complete, the structure will be disassembled, and residual feed will be removed from the sites.

Safe transfer and handling of turkeys will be prioritized to minimize potential injury and/or mortality. In the event a turkey is seriously injured during the capture, handling, or transport process, the bird will be euthanized (e.g., bolt gun, cervical dislocation, or blunt trauma). All captured birds will be transported to Alberta in an enclosed trailer or canopied truck and released the same day. Releases will occur during daylight hours enabling the turkeys to regroup and select suitable roosting sites.

Proposal

ACA would like to request that the Alberta Fish and Game Association commit to provide funding for this multi-year project, ultimately aimed at establishing viable populations of wild turkeys in southwest Alberta and thus providing increased hunter opportunity in the future.

Literature Cited

Government of Alberta (GoA). 2022. *Management Plan for Wild Turkeys in Alberta*. Alberta Environment and Parks. February 2022. ISBN 978-1-4601-5378-9.

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