

Dept. of Natural Resources: Reveals season outlook for fall wild turkey, ruffed grouse and woodcock seasons

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) today announced the season outlook for ruffed grouse, woodcock and wild turkey, plus essential updates for hunters to be in the know ahead of the Sept. 18 and Sept. 25 season openers.

The DNR provides hunters with free online mapping tools to identify habitat types and public land open to hunting upland game birds. [The online Fields and Forest Lands Interactive Gamebird Hunting Tool](#) provides upland gamebird hunters with an interactive way to locate cover suitable for ruffed grouse and woodcock, managed dove fields and properties stocked with game farm pheasants. On the go, hunters can use the DNR's free [Hunt Wild Wisconsin mobile app](#).

Ruffed Grouse

The [ruffed grouse season](#) is open in Zone A Sept. 18 – Jan. 9, 2022. This earlier closure than previous years follows the DNR's 10-year [ruffed grouse management plan](#). In Zone B, the season is open Oct. 16 – Dec. 8.

Statewide drumming survey results indicated a decrease of 6% in breeding grouse compared to 2019. Surveys were not completed in 2020 due to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. In Wisconsin, the 10-year ruffed grouse population cycle typically peaks in years that end in 0, 9 or 1. This likely indicates we are entering the typical “down-phase” of the 10-year cycle.

To help track West Nile virus impacts in ruffed grouse, hunters are encouraged to

participate in the final year of the DNR's West Nile virus sampling project this fall. As a reminder to hunters who requested a kit, they are now available for pickup at the service station you indicated on the survey.

Woodcock

Wisconsin's woodcock hunting season is open Sept. 25 – Nov. 8. Like waterfowl and mourning doves, woodcock are migratory game birds, so hunters who plan to pursue them must [register annually with the Harvest Information Program \(HIP\)](#).

A small game license is required to hunt woodcock and ruffed grouse. Small game licenses and HIP registration are available online through [Go Wild](#) or at any [license agent](#).

Turkey

The fall turkey season opens statewide on Sept. 18. Closing dates for the fall turkey season vary by management zone. In zones 1-5, the season closes Jan. 9, 2022. In zones 6 and 7, the season closes Nov. 19. The use of dogs to hunt wild turkey is allowed statewide for the fall seasons.

Overall, Wisconsin's statewide wild turkey population remains strong. Following 30 years of sustained population growth and expansion across the state, wild turkeys are now found statewide. Wild turkey numbers appear to have stabilized at levels suitable to available habitat and will likely ebb and flow around those levels in response to weather, food availability and other natural factors.

Biologists closely monitor harvest during the either-sex fall turkey hunting season, as excessive hen harvest can affect turkey populations. Recent hen harvests in Wisconsin have been very low, and current hen harvest rates do not play a significant role in Wisconsin's turkey flock dynamics.

"Last winter was relatively mild with low snow levels statewide and few long-lasting cold snaps," said Alaina Gerrits, DNR Marinette County Wildlife Biologist. "Mild winter conditions paired with an early spring green-up and dry weather point to favorable brooding conditions for 2021. All field reports suggest a healthy and robust turkey population providing many opportunities for fall hunting."

Turkey hunters must have a fall turkey license, fall turkey harvest authorization and annual Wild Turkey Stamp. Each fall turkey license or conservation patron license

now includes a fall turkey harvest authorization. Hunters must choose the zone for which their harvest authorization will be valid at the time of purchase. If more than one fall turkey harvest authorization is desired, hunters may purchase bonus turkey harvest authorizations in select zones while inventory remains. Licenses, stamps and bonus turkey harvest authorizations are available online at [Go Wild](#) or any [license agent](#).

During gun deer season, turkey hunters are reminded that ground blinds on DNR lands are subject to highly visible color requirements. All unoccupied ground blinds must have the owner's name and address or DNR customer ID number near the door opening. Blinds and elevated devices can be left overnight Sept. 1 to Jan. 31 on DNR-managed properties north of Highway 64. Blinds and elevated devices south of Highway 64 on DNR-managed lands may not be left out overnight and must be removed daily at the close of shooting hours. Blinds used for waterfowl hunting or constructed entirely of vegetation do not have to be removed daily.

For more information on wild turkeys in Wisconsin, [visit the DNR Turkey Hunting and Management webpage](#).