



Show-Me Gobbler

A Tri-Annual Publication of the George C. Clark Missouri Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation
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Missouri House Recognizes NWTF's 50-Year Legacy of Wild Turkey Conservation

By NWTF

The National Wild Turkey Federation received recognition from the Missouri House of Representatives during the Conservation Day at the Capitol in Jefferson City, Missouri, on April 5. The resolution acknowledged the NWTF's commitment to conserving the state's wild turkey populations and preserving hunting traditions for future generations.

Rep. Bruce Sassmann of the 61st District and chairman of the Conservation and Natural Resources Committee introduced NWTF District Biologist John Burk in the chamber, presenting him with the framed resolution.

"Representative Sassmann was elected in 2020, but he has been a friend to conservation and, more specifically, the NWTF for many years prior to being a legislator," Burk said. "Bruce has been a participating landowner and mentor for our Governors Youth Turkey Hunt for the entire 14-year history of the event, and we are thrilled that he is in the role he currently serves. We are also extremely appreciative that he took the time and made the effort to recognize our 50th Anniversary in front of his peers in the legislature."

The resolution concludes with:

"Whereas the National Wild Turkey Federation, at the national level has achieved all of these aforementioned accomplishments, the chapter system in Missouri, much like the Missouri Department of Conservation that we frequently partner with, has established itself as a national leader amongst its peers;

Be it resolved by the (Senate/House of Representatives/General Assembly) of the (State/118th Congress of the United States of America) that we recognize and celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the National Wild Turkey Federation and salute the organization, its chapters, and members from across the United States for their tremendous efforts to further scientific, state-led wildlife management and the conservation of America's wild turkey and its habitat.

We wish the National Wild Turkey Federation, its members, and chapters the best for the future as they continue to deliver their mission by working across land-ownership boundaries on a landscape scale to increase clean and abundant water, healthy forests and wildlife habitat, resilient communities, and robust recreational opportunities across the country."

The event, coordinated by the Conservation Federation of Missouri, celebrated the protection of outdoor recreation, with outdoorsmen and women assembling to show support for our natural resources.

Approximately 90 affiliate agencies and organization members, including the NWTF, gathered to represent the Missouri conservation community at the Conservation Day at the Capitol. The event provided the opportunity for these affiliates to showcase their organizational material in the capitol rotunda, allowing legislators and visitors to gain insight from them. In addition, central Missouri's local '80s rock station morning show hosts "Trevor and Shags" broadcasted at the event and interviewed attending groups.

The NWTF policy team and its volunteer leadership are working with state legislatures across the country to pass similar measures this year that enshrine the NWTF's legacy and mission delivery into state law.

Learn more about the NWTF's policy and advocacy work.



About the National Wild Turkey Federation Since 1973, the National Wild Turkey Federation has invested over half a billion dollars into wildlife conservation and has conserved or enhanced over 22 million acres of critical wildlife habitat. The organization continues to drive wildlife conservation, forest resiliency and robust recreational opportunities throughout the U.S. by working across boundaries on a landscape scale.

2023 is the NWTF's 50th anniversary and an opportunity to propel the organization's mission into the future while honoring its rich history. For its 50th anniversary, the NWTF has set six ambitious goals: positively impact 1 million acres of wildlife habitat; raise \$500,000 for wild turkey research; increase membership to 250,000 members; dedicate \$1 million to education and outreach programs; raise \$5 million to invest in technology and NWTF's people; and raise \$5 million to build toward a \$50 million endowment for the future. Learn how you can help us reach these lofty goals.

From the President To Carry On

By Kevin Hess

President MO State Chapter NWTF

As I write this our Missouri turkey season is winding down and I hope you all had a good one. Let me first introduce myself as the new President of the George C. Clark Missouri State Chapter. I have been on the State Board of Directors for the past 6 plus years and last 4 as Vice President and part of the Sho-Me Chapter in Springfield since 1995 in various roles. I currently live in the Pittsburg, MO area with my lovely wife, Sheri, on Pomme de Terre Lake.

I was born and raised in the Lebanon, Missouri area and that is where my passion for turkey hunting started with my Dad taking me and harvesting my first one when I was ten, way before any youth seasons were even thought about. Turkey hunting became a passion as I was cutting my teeth as a turkey hunter in the late 70s through the 80s (little did I know I was hunting the good ole days!).

It is still a passion today, not only hunting the grandest of all sporting birds but introducing the sport to the young, those with disabilities and new hunters in general, along with habitat and turkey management, which all line up with the mission of the NWTF and why I am proud to be a member/volunteer.

As I take on this new challenge it is a little overwhelming following Dan Zerr as President as he has not only led us tremendously the last 4 years but led Missouri to the number one chapter in the nation under the NWTF's L.A. Dixon Award System (Thank you Dan!). This is all in part to the best NWTF staff in the nation, great Board of Directors in place and mainly to all the chapter volunteers throughout the state. As Dan mentioned before a giant Thank You to all the volunteers for making this happen.



State Chapter President Kevin Hess with one of his 2023 birds.

I am hoping to carry on this great legacy but also help us focus on and report to you all the great work that NWTF is doing not only in Missouri but across the Midwest and Midsouth on turkey research and why there has been a decline in numbers and what we can do as turkey hunters and landowners to help fix it.

I do know there is no magic bullet and will take different practices in different places depending where you are in the state since we are such a diverse state from south to north. I look forward to this challenge and meeting more of our volunteers throughout the Great State of Missouri.



Show-Me Gobbler

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Missouri NWTF: Upcoming Banquets & Events

Current River Longbeards Banquet

August 3, 2023 - 5:30 PM
Hoagland Youth Center
202 Alexander
Van Buren, MO 63965
Contact: Delbert Dewolf
573-660-1114

Crowleys Ridge Limbangers

August 3, 2023 - 5:00 PM
The Meadows Event Venue
11049 State Hwy ZZ
Dexter, MO 63841
Contact: Dale Kemp
573-624-1283

River Bottom Gobblers

August 12, 2023 - 5:00 PM
Caruthersville Armory
801 West Third Street
Caruthersville, MO 63830
803-637-3106

Clay Howlett Memorial

September 9, 2023 - 5:00 PM
St. Robert Community Center
114 JH Williamson Dr.
St. Robert, MO 65584
Contact: David Howlett
573-512-1058

Platte Purchase

September 16, 2023 - 5:30 PM
Fraternal Order of Eagles
2004 N Belt Hwy
St. Joseph, MO 64503
Contact: Bryan Lukehart
lukehart.bryan@gmail.com

Mark Twain Lake Area NWTF Chapter

September 23, 2023 - 5:30 PM
Knights of Columbus Hall
Main St.
Monroe City, MO 63456
Contact: Nick Pfanner
573-406-8499

State Fair Strutters

September 30, 2023 - 5:30 PM
MEC Building
Missouri State Fair Grounds
Sedalia, MO 65301
Contact: Chuck Mattingly
660-281-5031

Bootheel Boss Gobblers Gun Blast

October 3, 2023 - 6:00 PM
Jackson K of C Hall
Hwy 61 North
Jackson, MO 63755
Contact: Bronson and Shawna Senn
573-225-3087

River Hills Thunderin Gun Bash

October 5, 2023 - 6:00 PM
Ste Gen K of C Hall
600 Market Street
Ste. Genevieve, MO 63627
Contact: Butch Stephens
573-543-2165

Bunt Cumbea Laclede Co Chapter

October 7, 2023 - 5:00 PM
Cowan Civic Center
500 E. Elm St.
Lebanon, MO 65536
Contact: Cindy Jones
417-533-4498

Green Hills Chapter

October 7, 2023 - 5:30 PM
Rock Barn
Grundy County Fairgrounds
Trenton, MO 64683
Contact: Freddie Griffin
660-359-7464



Join Us as We Work Across the Southeastern Landscape to Create Habitat for the Hatch

By NWTF

The restoration of the wild turkey is one of the greatest North American conservation success stories; however, since the early 2000s, we have seen a substantial decline in numbers throughout the Southeast. This is indicative in statistics such as wild turkey harvest and poult productivity data, signifying an overall decline. Some states are even reporting below two poults per hen, which is an alarming indicator of a declining wild turkey population and can have a population-level effect.

Goals and Objectives

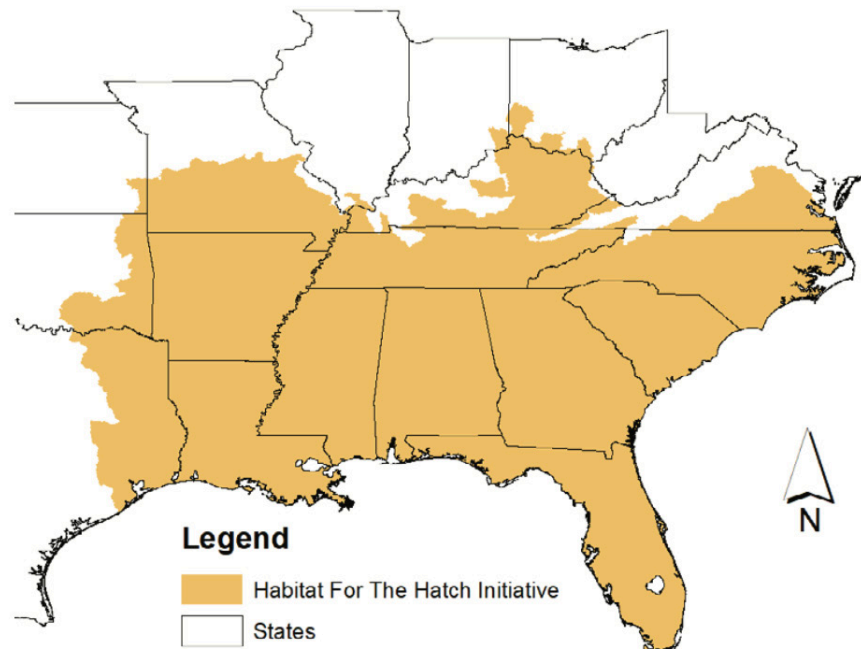
The purpose of this 10-year initiative is to improve forest and field health and resiliency at a landscape scale in Southeastern states through active management of over 1 million acres by 2033. This will ultimately lead to more robust wild turkey populations and healthier ecosystems across the Southeast.

The NWTF will continue critical work addressing the complete annual cycle of wild turkey habitat needs; however, acres included in Habitat for the Hatch's 1-million-acre goal are those that specifically establish nesting habitats with quality brood range in close proximity — in other words, Habitat for the Hatch! One million acres that fit these specific criteria will require a significant investment.

Conducting critical research and applying the findings will play a significant role ensuring the goals and objectives of the initiative are maintained beyond the initiative's end date in 2033. Past research was foundational to understanding the types of management activities that create and maintain early successional habitat for the benefit of wild turkeys; however, new research is needed due to increasingly changing landscape conditions across the Southeast. As such, researching contemporary and evolving habitat management practices and conditions will be critical to how we manage habitats in an everchanging landscape and are foundational for Habitat for the Hatch's success. Through critical habitat research, we will be able to provide education to public and private landowners, helping them implement specific habitat management practices on their lands at the appropriate time, space and scale.

The Landscape

Habitat for the Hatch encompasses the NWTF's Mid-South Rebirth and Southern Piney Woods Big Six of Wildlife Conservation regions. The initiative area includes all or portions of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.



Objectives:

- Supporting scientific research aimed at determining the most efficient and effective means to manage habitats for wild turkeys.
- Increasing controlled burning efforts in forested systems (hardwood and pine) and fields as appropriate throughout the Southeast.
- Increasing our forest conservation footprint on private lands via technical and financial assistance.
- Increase active management
- of forest stands to promote
- early successional habitat through activities such as timber stand improvement, thinning, mastication, crop tree release, planting and more.
- Chemical and mechanical removal of invasive plant species.
- Educating and engaging stakeholders, both direct and indirect, to raise awareness of the importance of controlled burning, active forest management and best management practices.

The NWTF will utilize the 10-year Habitat for the Hatch initiative to conserve and enhance our nation's forests and fields with partners through timely and appropriate active management of quality nesting and brood habitat. Success is possible through cooperative partnerships and reliable funding sources.

Critical wild turkey habitat restoration will be accomplished with an emphasis on the NWTF's Four Shared Values – establishing resilient communities, clean water, healthy forests and wildlife habitat in wild places

that offer significantly enhanced recreational opportunities. Additionally, Habitat for the Hatch is named for the many other wildlife species that benefit and hatch within areas we work in the Southeast, including insects, aquatic species, the imperiled gopher tortoise, red-cockaded woodpeckers and pollinators, all of which are indicators of healthy and resilient habitats. Wildlife species of greatest conservation need rely on the same habitats used by wild turkeys and will benefit significantly alongside wild turkeys. Southeastern forests and fields, when well managed, are havens for wild turkeys and provide many additional ecosystem-level benefits, including sequestering more carbon, providing clean water and abundant water, being more resilient to natural disturbances and overall providing robust recreational opportunities that are vitally important to America's sportsmen and women.

Financial Need

NWTF estimates a need of \$40 million – with partner collaboration – by the year 2033 to improve over 1 million acres of early successional habitat, which will improve nesting and brood-rearing conditions on both public and private lands. We anticipate leveraging funds at a minimum of 5:1. To accomplish this, the NWTF has an estimated fundraising goal of \$8 million over the next 10 years.

Clay Howlett Memorial Chapter Hosts 5th Annual Jakes Event and Mentored Youth Turkey Hunt.

By David Howlett

The Clay Howlett Memorial Chapter held their 2023 Jakes Event on March 25. First time turkey hunters between the ages of 9-15 participated in a turkey hunting workshop where they learned about turkey biology, turkey hunting techniques and calling, turkey hunting regulations, hunting safety, and shotgun patterning. Youth who attended the workshop were selected to participate in a mentored turkey hunt on April 1-2, at the farm of Art and Kathy Booth near Richland, and on the Ernie Calvert farm near Camdenton.

The hunters arrived early on opening morning and were paired with a conservation agent or NWTF member who served as hunting guides. On the opening morning of youth season, the high wind made calling and listening challenging, but the turkeys didn't mind as many of the hunters experienced multiple birds in a short amount of time. If they missed on a shot opportunity, another gobbler was waiting out there to give them another try. Hunters that bagged a bird opening day were:

- London Alexander – Richland
- Marshall Carroll – Richland
- Brooks Rozier – Osage Beach
- Ethan Chase – Waynesville
- Jara Milligan - Lebanon

The conditions were ideal on the 2nd day of youth season and every young hunter got either a shot opportunity or had birds in front of them, as it seemed again like a constant parade of birds throughout the day that kept the excitement going. Hunter Cote of Waynesville harvested his bird on day two.

- Hunter Cote – Waynesville

Overall, 6 of the 8 hunters bagged a bird, and all the young hunters either got a shot opportunity or had birds in front of them that stayed just of range to get a shot.

Special thanks are due to Art and Kathy Booth for their idea to sponsor the hunt by opening their property to the hunters and their hospitality for feeding and hosting everyone. The Booth's have done a tremendous job of managing their habitat to produce excellent nesting habitat for turkeys. In addition, they invested significant time in pre-hunt planning and scouting to ensure that mentors and hunters would be able to maximize the effectiveness of their time afield.



London Alexander - Richland



Marshall Carroll - Richland



Brooks Rozier - Osage Beach



Ethan Chase - Waynesville



Jara Milligan - Lebanon



Hunter Cote - Waynesville

Special thanks also go out to Ernie Calvert Sr. and Ernie Calvert Jr. for hosting half the hunters on their Camden County farm. The Calvert farm has the most rugged terrain the state of Missouri has to offer, with excellent turkey habitat, and an incredible number of turkeys... it's a turkey hunters dream come true.

Both Ernie Sr. and Ernie Jr. did the pre-hunt scouting, blind placement. and had the campfire and food ready for the kids when they came in for lunch.

Sincere appreciation is due to MDC Conservation Agents Jared Milligan, Logan Brawley, Nathan Ingle, David Ingram, and Aaron Pondrom; State Board Member and Clay Howlett Memorial Chapter President Dave Howlett. NWTF members George Dalgetty and Jason Peace served as hunting guides.

Hunters cannot be recruited and introduced to the sport without knowledgeable mentors willing to give of their time and talents. We appreciate their willingness to share their passion to ensure our hunting heritage.

Events like these are also how we ultimately achieved and how we will continue to accomplish the important task of recruited, retaining, and reactivating hunters into the future. Therefore, if you think your chapter might be interested in this worthwhile endeavor, start planning now. Even if you can't put on an event that hosts multiple hunters, invite someone new to share a hunting experience with you in a one-on-one hunt and then let us know about it by contacting John Burk at 573-676-5994 or jburk@nwtf.net.

The George C. Clark Missouri State Chapter Member Harvest Highlights

Share your outdoor experiences with your NWTF peers. Submit them to John Burk at jb Burk@nwtf.net with a brief caption and they will be considered for the harvest page section of your Show-Me Gobbler newsletter.



Aaron Bennett of the Kingdom of Callaway Limbhangers Chapter with his 2023 bird.



Sons Avery and Ayden Dean of State Board member Adam with their springboks and Ayden with his dad and one of his 2023 turkeys.



Brian Pell, brother-in-law of state board member Mark McKordendale with his 2023 bird.



Representative Bruce Sassmann and perennial guide for Governors Youth Turkey Hunt with his 2023 bird and a pair for brother and sister Liam and Lyla Breshears.



Cole Irwin with a bird that mentor and RD Mike Allen made happen.



Brandon Butler of Driftwood Outdoors with his north MO bird (right) and one from IN (left).



Don Masek of the Kingdom of Callaway Limbangers with his first of 2 trophy class 2023 birds.



Past state board member and secretary, Brian Duckett with a nice bow.



4 Rivers Chapter committee member Eldo Meyer with 2023 bird one.



Evan Neff. Successful JAKE from Leadbelt Longbeards. 22.5 lbs, 9.5in beard, 1in spurs.



NWTF Digital Media Specialist Gilbert Randolph with his first turkey harvest.



James Wilson had a successful turkey hunt with his daughter Paige in Ripley County Missouri! James is an avid turkey hunter that has had the opportunity to involve both of his children.



James Wilson and his son Anthony aka: "Soul Stealer II" had a successful hunt in Kansas harvesting both birds. Anthony was also successful during the youth turkey season this year.

Harvest Highlights Cont'd



Jakes member Gunner Skaggs of the Ozark Mountain Gobblers chapter with his first turkey.



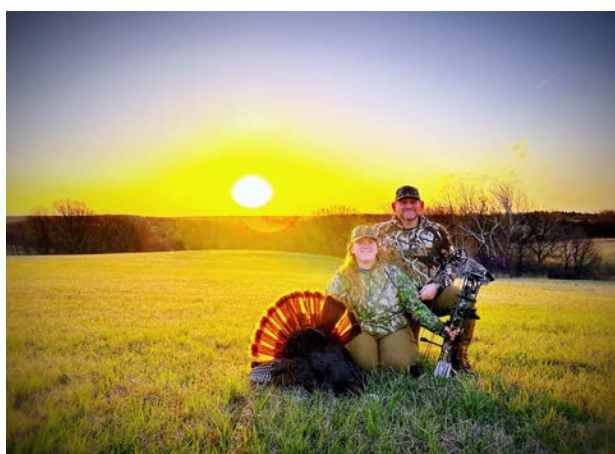
State board member Jay Herring and son-in-law Tyler with their 2023 IA harvests.



Jay with one of his 2023 MO birds.



Project forester Justin Ferguson with one of his MO birds and son Tyler.



Central Region Director of Conservation Operations Jared McJunkin and daughter Keeley with her KS bow kill.



Logan Burk son of District Biologist John and his buddy Matt Popp with a Callaway County double.



USFWS Biologist Chris Woodson with one of his 2023 birds.



Hannah Ernst killing her first bird with her father Sean.



13 year old Mariah Box from Wheatland harvested her first wild turkey in the recent youth season in Hickory County. The bird weighed 25.3 lbs, had 1" spurs and sported a 10" beard. Her sister Kendrah Box had participated in the Governor's Youth Hunt & harvested her first turkey as well this past weekend.



State Board member Mark McCorkendale with his 2023 goulds.



National Forestry Initiative Forester Tyler Rodes with his first 2023 bird.



Payne Howlett, son of state board member Dave and friend Gabriel Morrow with their 2 first birds guided by Dave.



First time turkey hunter Tim Burlett with his first bird guided by forester Justin Ferguson.



CFM Executive Director Tyler Schwartze with a double bearded opening day dandy.



Wayne Close with a Bates County 5 bearded bird of a lifetime.

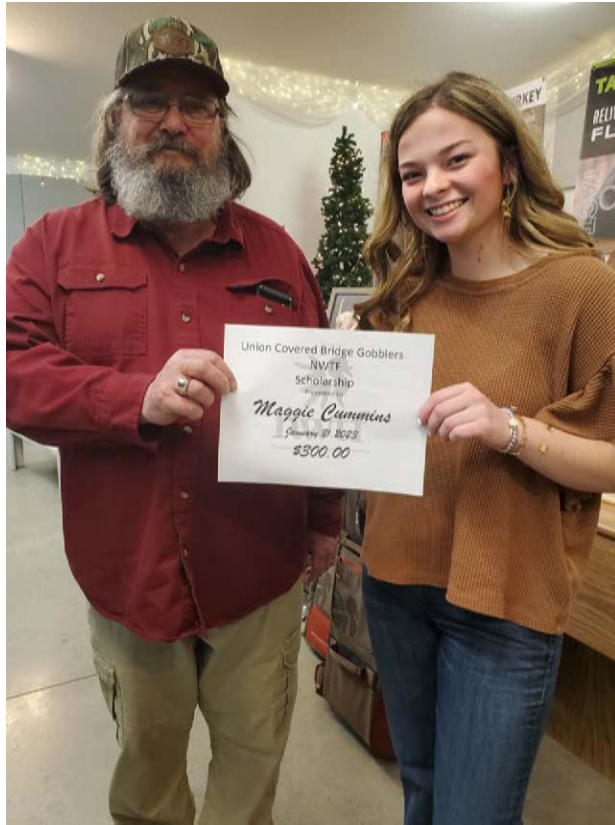


Project Biologist Will Rechkemmer and wife Danita with their public land double.

Scholarship Award Winners



Officer of the Year Zachery Barnes pictured with RD Mike Allen and State Chapter President Dan Zerr.



Union Covered Bridge Chapter president Bruce Mills with their scholarship winner Maggie Cummins.



Jordan Harmon of the Chariton River Full Strutters Chapter with their scholarship winners Collin Swallow and Ryan Cruse.



Karie Holman (R) and Brenda Aumus (L) of the Fabius River Fantails with their recipients Blake Parrish and Keaton Strange.



Quentin Willis of the Grand River Gobblers Chapter with their recipient Newt Hodge.



Cooper County Limbhangers chapter leaders Eugene Walje and Vaughn Sell with their recipient Carter Taylor.



Spencer Estes and Derek Payne, local Chapter President of the Springtown Wattlenecks NWTF Chapter in Kearney, MO and State board member. Spencer is our scholarship winner. We presented him his check at our March 31st 2023 Annual Hunting Heritage Banquet.



Rogersville Strutters Chapter in Rogersville MO gave 1 Scholarship away. \$500 scholarship to Brooke Wilson.

Arkansas View NWTF Project in the Ava Ranger District, Mark Twain National Forest

By Will Rechkemmer
NWTF Project Biologist

Since 2018, the NWTF has partnered with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in an agreement to restore glades and open woodlands in the Ava Ranger District of the Mark Twain National Forest. This work occurred along the well-known Glade Top Trail Scenic Route. This project was developed to assist the USFS in removing Eastern Red Cedar and other off-site tree species from glades and woodlands in the area, and return it to an open herbaceous plant dominated state. Funding was provided from a 124-acre timber harvest, the USFS, and in-kind match from the NWTF Missouri Super Fund. In total, project costs were around \$97,000 dollars. The Arkansas View project, completed this spring, restored 124 acres of open woodland and 162 acres of glades. Glades are a unique habitat type that occur on steep, rocky South and West facing slopes across Southern Missouri.

Due to the shallow soils, tree growth is often limited to species that can tolerate the extremely dry conditions. Eastern Red Cedar is one species that can tolerate this, however would not have typically been found in abundance on glades when regular prescribed burning takes place. Without fire, much of the glades in Missouri have become overwhelmingly shaded out by an abundance of Eastern Red Cedar. This has led to a decline in quality habitat by shading out the diverse layer of grasses and wildflowers that typically occupy glades. In addition, habitat for many unique species such as the Eastern Collared Lizard, a species of conservation concern, has been lost.

Restoring glades and open woodlands is a two-part process that first requires chainsaw felling all Cedar and trees that are off-site. Next the felled trees are allowed to dry for a year or two, and a prescribed burn is conducted to remove slash and reduce woody sprouts.

Prescribed burning is then conducted on a 2-5-year rotation to maintain the open grass and wildflower layer. Glades and woodlands provide extremely high-quality turkey brood habitat due to the diverse wildflowers that attract a plethora of insects. They also provide optimal plant structure that has overhead structure to protect poults from aerial predators, and bare ground between plants that allow poults to evade terrestrial predators and forage more easily.



Kendrah Box chosen for 2023 Missouri Governor's Youth Turkey Hunt

By Don Koenig

Kendrah Box, 11 years old, from Wheatland was one of 15 participants invited to attend Governor Parson's 2023 Youth Turkey Hunt. The annual Governor's Hunt, in its 14th year, is made possible by partners including: the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF), Conservation Commission of Missouri, the Missouri Department of Conservation, Friends of the NRA, Bass Pro Shops, and private landowners. The goal of the event is to introduce youth to hunting with a focus on those who have never hunted previously or at least have never turkey hunted. Landowners volunteer hunting land and experienced hunters volunteer as guides/callers.

On Friday before the season opened, the youth and their parents toured the capital at Jeff City including the Governor's Office, the Secretary of State's Office, Interior & Exterior of the Rotunda, Legislator's Offices and the voting floor of the House Chamber.

After the tour all were invited to the Governor's Mansion for a dinner and gift presentation with various agency and organizational leaders and legislators. One of their gifts was a commemorative dated Turkey Call stamped with the Seal of the State of MO and the signature of Governor Mike Parson.

Kendrah's guides for the event were NWTF State Board President Kevin Hess and NWTF member Don Koenig. She harvested her first turkey on a windy opening Saturday morning in Hickory County, a 25 pound tom that had four beards totaling 21.75 inches in length and spurs just over 1" long. All the youth who were successful will receive a House Proclamation for their accomplishment.



Mark Twain Lake Middle Fork Turkey Management Unit Clarence Cannon Dam and Mark Twain Lake 2023 NWTF Superfund Project

By USACE

Clarence Cannon Dam and Mark Twain Lake has collaborated with the National Wild Turkey Federation to establish 16 acres of warm season grassland with interspersed forbs in the Middle Fork Management Unit. The area maintains a sizeable population of Eastern Wild Turkey, but lacked optimal grassland cover to provide ideal nesting and brood rearing habitat.

Utilizing NWTF Superfund grant funding, Mark Twain Lake purchased grass and forb seed from Pure Air Natives. Realizing the need for woody cover that can be easily managed and modified by natural and mechanical means, Staghorn and Smooth Sumac Seed was purchased from Lovelace Seed Company. The seed was incorporated with the warm season grass mix, and dispersed throughout the planting area.

With intentions to perform a dormant seed planting in December 2022, cold weather froze the ground and did not permit planting. On April 14, 2023, the warm season grass/forb/sumac mix was planted on the site. Site preparation was minimal as the area was planted in an annual cereal rye mix the preceding Fall.

Follow-up treatment in 2023 will include mowing to control undesirable weed growth that does not contribute to the established goals. Subsequent growing seasons, prescribed burns will be implemented to manage vegetative composition in the newly established warm season grass management area.



Chasing Spring

By Lisa Beumer

I have been asked if I am ‘Chasing 49’? (To my non turkey friends this is harvesting a bird in each state that has them, Alaska does not.) No, I am ‘Chasing Spring’, ‘Chasing turkey season’. Trying to hunt as much as I can, while I can.

Thoughts as my 2023 turkey season closes? I thank God. I thank God for the opportunities afforded me. For my family and friends, for my friends that have become family. We have met so many amazing people. Friends across the country.

9 Longbeards in one season! No blinds (except Florida, the landowner insisted), no guides and no decoys (we tried once this season and it cost me the gobbler!) Together Larry and I killed 21 birds this season and was with friends for many more! I was there to witness my good friend harvest her first Merriams!

My father would not have words, he would be so happy. He is with me on every hunt. He was 44 when he killed his first bird, I was 43 when I killed my first. He only lived 11 more years.



I think about his limitations due to health. How I have learned to not take that for granted. Every morning watching the world wake up. Waiting for the first tree yelp, hearing the first gobble. The excitement when I hear wings batting on fly down. Walking uphill for forever to finally reach the crest, breathing heavily while being able see for miles with wind blowing through my hair.

Taking naps on hilltops in the sun while waiting on a courtesy gobble. Watching the wind blow through long grasses. The crunch of the leaves and sticks beneath my boots. The pleasure in making a silent step with no leaves or sticks. The excitement of an unexpected gobble. The thrill of the game. I still get the shakes after a heart pounding hunt and occasionally tear up! I go to sleep mentally planning the first moves in the morning. I dream every night about turkeys during turkey season. Nothing else matters when I hunt, problems seem to melt away. I didn’t understand my father’s excitement when I was a kid, I get it now. The bug has bitten me worse. I wish we could’ve shared the passion while he was alive.

I am thankful for Larry. I had killed 5 birds when we met. We have hunted together for 6 seasons and I am up to 39. He is a phenomenal woodsman. He is my teacher. I love to learn. I am getting to the point where I know what we are going to do before he says it. Sometimes we differ on opinion on what to do. Sometimes I am right. Larry hunts hard. I hunt hard. He makes sure my dreams come true.

I am now 2 years younger than my father was when he died. I’m gonna hunt as hard as I can while I can!

Fourteenth Annual Governors Youth Turkey Hunt

By John Burk & Tyler Schwartze

The 2023 Governors Youth Turkey Hunt marks the 14th year of this very special event. The hunt serves as a recognition by our government, of the importance of natural resources and outdoor recreation to the Missouri citizenry. It is also a celebration of Missouri's leading role in recruiting, retaining, and reactivating hunters.

The hunt is a cooperative effort between Governor Mike Parson, the Conservation Federation of Missouri, National Wild Turkey Federation, the Missouri Department of Conservation, Friends of the NRA, and private landowners.

The youth started the weekend off on the day before the season opened by attending an informational session on turkeys and turkey calling. The youth learned the basics of calling, woods etiquette, and other things to be aware of when pursuing wild turkeys. They also had an opportunity to pattern their shotguns and learn about hunter safety. This very informative clinic was put on by the dedicated staff at the Missouri Department of Conservation.

The evening portion of Friday's festivities took place at the Governor's mansion where the youth and a guest were able to enjoy a delicious variety of finger foods prior to evening program. Representatives from the partnering agencies and organizations spoke briefly about the importance of the event as well as elevated the anticipation of what awaited the young hunters throughout the remainder of this special weekend. The speakers included Kevin Hess, the State Chapter President from the National Wild Turkey Federation, Sara Parker Pauley from the Missouri Department of Conservation, Gregg Pearre, Friends of the NRA State Fund Chairman, Tyler Schwartze, Executive Director of the Conservation Federation of Missouri, and Bruce Sassmann, Representative of the 61st

District. The youth were then each given a custom call made by Jim Clark before taking their picture with Sara and John Burk. From there the youth departed across the state to meet up with their landowners and guides to try and notch their first turkey tag.

Turkey hunting is a pretty weather-dependent activity. To get the best opportunity to experience "the show" you pray for clear calm conditions at dawn. Unfortunately, "Ma Nature" threw a curveball for the opener with most of the state experiencing heavy sustained winds for nearly the entirety of the season opener, Saturday April first.

However, Sunday was more what the doctor ordered and most of those that were able to hunt the second day experienced the turkey hunting game as it was designed to be played. Overall the results were good with 8 out of the 15 kids participating harvesting birds. Statewide, 2,566 birds were harvested over the youth weekend, April 1 and 2 of 2023. Top harvest counties were Osage with 71, Miller with 65, and Texas with 64. Comparatively, young hunters checked 2,881 turkeys during the 2022 spring youth weekend.

Representative Bruce Sassmann put a cherry on top again this year. Bruce is having plaques made for each of the kids that harvested turkeys with an official resolution capturing their special weekend.



All of these hunts throughout the 14 year history of this event have occurred on private land. We are therefore indebted to the generosity of the private landowners and guides that make it possible every year. The 2023 Guides and Landowners included: R.L. Bennett, Brad Peters, Bill Haag, Bruce Sassmann, Steven Harrison, Brandon Butler, Dwayne Lucasl, Jim Cihy, Cole Cihy, Tyler Schwartze, Tim Taylor, Kevin Hess, Logan Burk, David Guerrant, Jake Buxton, Mike Kehoe, Adam Voight, John Burk, and Jason Isabelle.

Thanks, once again, to everyone that made this year's hunt so special for Missouri's youth. Most of the landowners and guides are dedicated NWTF and/or CFM members and without them, this event would not be possible. We especially thank the landowners; the incredibly special gift that you willingly give year after year cannot be repaid. Please know that all involved are aware of this and that your efforts truly are making a difference in the cherished memories that you made possible.

The perennial success that this event has accomplished is largely a product of the overall quality of the experiences it has been able to provide the participants.



Floodplain Restoration on the Big Muddy

By NWTF

The NWTF Missouri State Chapter is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to increase wildlife habitat and overall ecosystem health on the Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge.

Nicknamed the Big Muddy because of its cloudy, sediment-filled waters, the lower Missouri River is the largest free-flowing river in the country. It encompasses about 1.5 million acres of essential bottomland habitat for many plant and wildlife species, including wild turkeys.

The FWS established a nearly 30,000-acre refuge around the river in 1994 after the “Great Flood of 1993,” among the most devastating in the nation’s history.

Shortly after the refuge was instituted, the FWS enacted a plan to both reestablish and conserve the area’s unique riparian habitats, seasonal wetlands, bottomland forests and native floodplain grasslands ravaged by the flood. For almost three decades, the FWS has continually achieved conservation objectives that have returned the area to its former glory.

However, the refuge recently acquired 510 acres of private land that needed some work to transform it back to its native habitat type.

Through collaboration with the NWTF, Pheasants/Quail Forever and the Army Corps of Engineers, work is underway to revitalize this newly acquired parcel to a diverse mix of floodplain prairie habitat.

The NWTF Missouri State Chapter allocated \$12,000 from its Super Fund to help purchase a mixture of native grasses and wildflowers, which were planted earlier this year.



“The seed planting will restore all 510 acres of critical prairie habitat and will bolster the value of the overall ecosystem,” said John Burk, NWTF district biologist for Missouri, Iowa and Illinois. “Recent research data tells us that one of the single biggest reasons for our turkey decline is a significant decline in poult survival from what it had been when we were setting harvest records every year almost 20 years ago. The most efficient and effective way to improve poult survival is to improve the quantity and quality of early brood rearing habitat; this project does just that and at a significant scale. The project goes beyond just game species, though. It benefits declining pollinators and grassland-dependent bird species, such as the eastern meadowlark and dickcissels. It’s really all-encompassing.”

After the wildflowers and native grasses are established, the 510 areas will be managed in perpetuity, specifically through the Big Muddy National Wildlife Refuge’s Prescribed Fire Program.

This work complements the refuge’s objective of restoring and maintaining 5,200 acres of high-quality prairie habitat over the next 15 years.



Moreover, all 510 acres impacted by this prairie restoration project will be open to outdoor recreation opportunities, including hunting.

“This project really showcases what the NWTF is all about,” Burk said. “Improving wild turkey habitat and increasing hunting opportunities, while benefiting many other species and improving the overall health of the ecological community. Healthy habitats equal healthy harvests.”



Benefits of Native Habitat Management



By Will Rechkemmer
NWTF Project Biologist

Managing for native habitat has a wealth of benefits; some very simple, such as cover and food sources for wildlife. Other more complex benefits include improved soil health, ecosystem services, and restoration of declining communities, but what is native habitat management?

Native habitat management is the manipulation of habitat structure and diversity to restore land health and ecosystem services to the land. Native habitat management can occur at scales as small as landscaping around your home, to thousands of acres. Native habitat management is not brush mowing a field once a year without specific goals, or planting clover bi-annually while neglecting the acres of forest, woodland, or grassland surrounding it.

When managed appropriately, native habitat provides cover and food sources exponentially greater than an 1/8-acre hidey hole food plot or close mowed field. There's nothing wrong with planting a small food plot as a means of ambushing your quarry, but they are not producing more wildlife, only drawing them to a place where you have a tree stand hung. Focusing efforts on the habitat surrounding food plots, will provide all around benefits to the wildlife on your property.

Adding food plots at large scales may have desired effects, however many management practices such as thinning or prescribed fire are much more cost effective and will have long term benefits on the health of your property. Forest thinning and prescribed fire create a flush of new herbaceous and woody growth that acts as a natural food plot across your property, while also providing quality bedding and brood rearing cover.

Producing more poults and fawns requires increased habitat quantity, quality, and year-round food sources, three things that hidey hole food plots and brush mowed fields lack. Restoring open land to early successional stages that encourage native grasses, flowers, and shrubs provides great benefits to wild turkey and white-tail deer.

These areas are excellent bugging areas for poults, which need high protein insects to produce flight feathers in order to avoid predators. Ideally, open areas will have 20 or more species of native clump forming grasses, flowers and shrubs vs. many typical food plots with 1-3 species of non-native plants. Quality open areas will also have bare ground and spaces between plants that form a canopy over the poults. This allows poults to navigate at ground level easily, but provides cover from predators above. Early successional habitats also have a wealth of benefits to deer which use them for fawning, feeding, and bedding cover.

Advertising & Article Deadlines for the Show-Me Gobbler Publication

Winter Deadline - November 17, 2023

Article Submission Note:

Please feel free to submit future articles with photos to the contact information listed above. Submission requirements: Digital copy submitted in Microsoft Word. Digital photographs only. Please use at least 225 resolution (dpi), or medium to high settings from your phone. Photos submitted outside of these guidelines may not be suitable for printing. Please include photo captions and credits for each photo submitted. Thank you for your contributions and we look forward to your participation in the future.

Issues Facing Turkeys and Their Management in the Ozarks

By Justin Ferguson
Forester

For the most part, the MO Ozarks are a mix of heavily wooded hills surrounding rolling farmland. A large majority of this farmland is in livestock production, though some row crop agriculture is also present, especially in river and creek bottoms. Below are several of the factors affecting wild turkeys in the MO Ozarks and beyond:

- **Closed Canopy/Unmanaged Forest:** The vast majority of forestland in the southern half of the state sits idle with little to no thought from the landowner. Over time with lack of disturbance, the canopy of these forests close, resulting in very limited light reaching the forest floor. This diminishes the habitat value of these areas during all but the late fall and winter when acorns and other hard mast reach the forest floor. Closed canopy forestland does not provide quality nesting or brood rearing habitat to turkeys that we know is critical to their production.

If timber harvesting on a property without thoughtful planning and follow up management, the result is often a “high-grading” in which the best trees are removed and trees of poor quality or undesirable species are left behind to regenerate the forest. It is easy to understand that this is not in the best long-term interest for the value of the forested resource and wildlife, turkeys included.

- **Habitat Loss/Derecho Damage:** Several regions of the Ozarks were severely impacted by the 2009 Midwest derecho. This windstorm blew down hillsides across southern MO with notable damage to Madison, Iron, and Reynolds Counties. Entire swaths of fallen trees created nearly impenetrable cover at ground level. Since the windstorm, most of these areas have regenerated into “dog-hair” thick patches that are essentially unusable by turkeys.

Turkeys rely on their eyesight as a first line of defense. If they cannot see 30-50’ they do not feel comfortable in an area and will avoid it. These habitats will eventually return to being usable by turkeys but in some instances, it may take decades for a forest to mature back into turkey habitat. This is an example of a natural disturbance that has had landscape level impacts on turkey distribution.



- **Open land vegetation types:** Much of the open land in the Ozarks is in non-native cool season grass pastures. This poses several issues for turkeys. Cool season grasses used for livestock grazing are generally sod-forming grasses. Frail turkey poults have a difficult time walking through dense mats of grass and rely on bare-ground habitats.

Also, non-native grasses do not have many native insect associations. This results in limited insect availability for poults, which is absolutely critical to their survival. Grass pastures can also act as a trap for nesting hens. If nesting cover in the surrounding woodlands is limited, hens may nest in tall grass as a result. Many of these nests will be doomed due to May hay cutting.

The issue of cool season grass impact on turkeys is complicated because cattle producers rely on them for a livelihood. One cannot blame producers here because people need the land to work for them, but this is an unfortunate factor in the turkey decline.

- **Spring Rainfall:** Wet springs negatively impact production regardless of habitat quality, especially when combined with high predator populations and habitat configuration (i.e. linear and easily searched vs larger blocks). Historical spring (March-May) rainfall records from 1895-2015 indicate an average of 12 inches. When comparing the spikes and troughs between our brood survey records and these rainfall records, in nearly every case where we had a spike in production we had a corresponding trough in spring rainfall.

Weather patterns tend to be cyclical as do turkey population fluctuations. Although wet springs are bad for ground nesting birds, habitat quality, quantity, and configuration can mitigate some of the effects of weather and definitely sets the table for boom years when conditions are favorable. There was a notable uptick in poult-per-hen numbers during the 2022 nesting and brood rearing season that coincided with very dry weather.

- **Predators:** There is no secret, abundance of mammalian and avian predators are at historic highs. Limited interest in trapping due to fur market declines has essentially removed recreational harvest of furbearers on a landscape level. Many counties also have significant feral hog abundance though hog numbers are down in some areas do to eradication efforts.

To further compound the predation issue, the landscape has changed making it more conducive for predator success rather than upland game species, turkeys included. For instance, habitat fragmentation has led to long, linear habitats with hard edges that give predators like raccoons that rely on scent a significant advantage.

What can a landowner do to address the decline?

- **Forest and Woodland Management:** For many properties, management of wooded resources is a great opportunity to increase the productivity of habitat for a variety of wildlife without sacrificing economic productivity of their open land. In general, our timberlands in the Ozarks are heavily overstocked with trees, leading to limited habitat productivity.

Management practices like Timber Stand Improvement thinning and prescribed burning can be utilized to improve turkey habitat. Thoughtful forest management will release individual trees from competition allowing them to grow faster and produce more mast. This can improve both commercial timber and wildlife habitat value of a property.

Restoration of historic open woodland and glade natural communities provides tremendous nesting and brood rearing habitat opportunities that are sorely lacking on the landscape. Well-managed woodland communities provide poults with security cover from predators and abundant insects to forage on.

It is best to consult with a resource professional before beginning forest/ woodland management activities on a property. Contact your NWTFF Project Forester or MDC Private Lands Conservationist for more details on planning forest management practices. In addition, opportunity for state and federal cost-share funding exists to help landowners implement these practices.

- **Open Land Management:** As previously discussed, open land management may impact a producers financial bottom line so management of open land for turkeys may not be attainable. However, it should be noted that managing open land as early successional habitats can provide tremendous nesting and brood rearing habitat for turkeys, greatly improving the productivity of a property.

This can be as simple as chemically killing the non-native cool season grasses with herbicide and then periodically burning to stimulate herbaceous species in the seed bank. Many species common in the seedbank like ragweed and common goldenrod provide substantial insect attraction and ideal cover structure that poults need to navigate and forage. State and federal cost-share opportunities exist for establishing pollinator plots, including numerous species of wildflowers that turkey broods greatly benefit from.

At the moment, there are federal cost-share dollars for converting cool season grass pastures into native warm season grass pastures for forage purposes. This is an opportunity for a livestock producer to provide cattle a forage opportunity that is resilient to drought, all increasing habitat value for turkeys. A good point of contact for open land management on your property would be your local MDC Private Lands Conservationist or your local NRCS Field office.

Can trapping/predator hunting improve turkey populations?

- In general, recreational trapping alone on a property is not going to move the needle. Limited research on turkeys exists indicating that trapping can improve populations. The body of research that does exist (including research on other similar ground nesting upland birds) points to habitat suitability being the dominant factor in nest success and poult production.

The research available indicates that for trapping to have an impact it must be implemented on a large scale, it must be intensive, and it must be timed appropriately. The scale and intensity requirements put meaningful management of predators out of the reach of the VAST majority of landowners.

More research is needed in this area of turkey biology. At this time, the best advice available is focus on habitat to benefit turkey numbers and enjoy predator trapping/hunting as a recreational pursuit if desired. The bottom line is that without habitat requirements addressed, removal of predators will not make a significant difference in turkey production.

Unfortunately, there is no quick fix here (including regulatory) for our turkey population woes. If there were, it would certainly have been fixed by now. However, the safest bet for a landowner wishing to bolster turkey numbers is to increase the amount of brood rearing habitat on a property. Technical (and potentially financial) assistance is available to Missouri landowners.

Contact your local MDC Private Lands Conservationist or your local NRCS Field office for details on obtaining assistance.

Missouri Turkey Habitat Initiative

By Megan Duffee-Yates

The decline of wild turkeys in Missouri has been a concern for landowners and land managers alike. Nesting and brood rearing are the most dangerous times for a hen turkey, as she exposes herself to ground predators, the elements and disturbance. Quality nesting and brood rearing habitat depend on early successional vegetation structure to help conceal the hen and poults. With high loss of nests to predators due to the lack of nesting structure, it is imperative that nesting structure is achieved and maintained during the almost two month long nesting period for wild female turkeys. Taking into account also, that the first two weeks of a wild turkey poult's life is spent flightless and dependent on ground structure for escape cover and foraging, providing habitat for broods is also imperative for the future survival of wild turkey's in Missouri.

The Missouri Turkey Habitat Initiative will help clarify and demonstrate the characteristics of quality turkey habitat that wild turkeys require. The Turkey Habitat Initiative will create a movement to improve current habitat where it is needed and to increase quality habitat throughout the state of Missouri. The main focal points of the Turkey Habitat Initiative are providing quality nesting habitat and brood rearing habitat to increase population numbers. Seeing as nesting habitat and structure is different than that of what is required for brood rearing structure, management needs will be different to achieve these end goals.

The Missouri Turkey Habitat Initiative goals are to provide education, inform and provide recommendations regarding turkey nest and brood-rearing habitat in Missouri, while working with partner groups throughout the state of Missouri. Partner associations include: National Wild Turkey Federation, National Deer Association, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation, Missouri Trappers Association, U.S Army Corp of Engineers, United States Forest Service, National Park Service, and the LAD Foundation.

Nesting habitat for wild turkeys can be defined as having higher concealment at the .5-1 meter level at the nest and 5 meters from the nest. This cover, in most studies, consisted of an understory composition of greenbrier, barberry and any vegetation of the Rubus species. Nests located in forests and woodlands were placed within a range of understory vegetation, which included vines, woody shrubs of various species and within debris of fallen trees.



Nests with dense, thorny vegetation surrounding it, helped reduce the efficiency of which a predator was able to forage and helped nest success by impeding the movement of potential nest predators. It should be noted that although vegetation cover enhances nest concealment, there is a point at which a high density of vertical stems could be detrimental to a hens ability to detect and escape approaching predators.

Good brood rearing habitat needs to provide essential escape cover, loafing cover, roosting cover and quality food sources. Quality brood rearing habitat is characterized by ground cover that is dominated by forbs (wildflowers) and brambles up to a height of 50cm tall that provides an overhead canopy to help conceal poults, but still allows mobility underneath for poult movement and shelter from the elements. This “umbrella” cover is also vitally important in providing foraging opportunities, as insects make up almost the entire diet of a young poults life to ensure adequate growth and development.

The Missouri Department of Conservation and their partners are dedicated to ensuring that there is a healthy future for Missouri's wild turkey populations. Through state-wide educational workshops that will be geared towards providing nesting and brood rearing habitat, providing Webcasts, educational videos and Landowner Cost Share Assistance funding geared towards early successional vegetation establishment and maintenance. The Missouri Turkey Habitat Initiative, along with partners, is here to create a bright future of wild turkeys in Missouri.

Megan Duffee-Yates

Meagan Duffee-Yates was born and raised near Dallas, Texas. She spent her time away from school hunting and fishing with her father before coming to Missouri for college. She has an undergraduate degree in Fisheries and Wildlife and a graduate degree in Science with an emphasis in wildlife. She is an avid outdoorswoman that enjoys chasing mature white-tails and bugling elk with her bow. Her favorite game animal to hunt in Missouri is mature gobblers. She is currently working on her grand slam with a dream of a world slam in the future.

She is also a master falconer and utilizes a trained bird of prey to hunt wild game. She has been doing falconry for 18 years now. She has state and federal permits that allow her to chase game with her birds. Currently she is hunting with a peregrine falcon on ducks and looks forward to pursuing upland game in Kansas and Nebraska with it this winter. She has worked for the Missouri Department of Conservation 8 years in August and has spent the past 6 years as a Private Lands Conservationist II for Barton, Jasper and Lawrence counties. She will be the new Turkey Habitat Initiative Coordinator (a two year detailed position) until March 2025.

