

Manitoba Wild Turkey Trap and Transfer Program 2022/23 Report

Manitoba Economic Development, Investment, Trade and Natural Resources

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Summary

Two hundred and forty three wild turkeys were released at six sites across southern Manitoba in winter 2022/23. Conflict birds that sourced these releases were captured at four sites in southern Manitoba.

Trapping

Wild turkeys that exceeded the tolerance level of landowners and agricultural producers were captured at four sites across southern Manitoba in winter 2022/23 (Figure 1). In total, 253 turkeys were captured during 14 trapping events between December 19, 2022 and March 8, 2023 (Table 1). Captured turkeys were either released immediately into existing flocks, or placed in holding facilities located in the Treherne or Brandon areas to be released at new introduction sites during late-winter. Two mortalities occurred during trapping activities, and five individuals died while in holding facilities.

Figure 1: 2022/23 Wild Turkey Trapping and Release Sites in Manitoba.

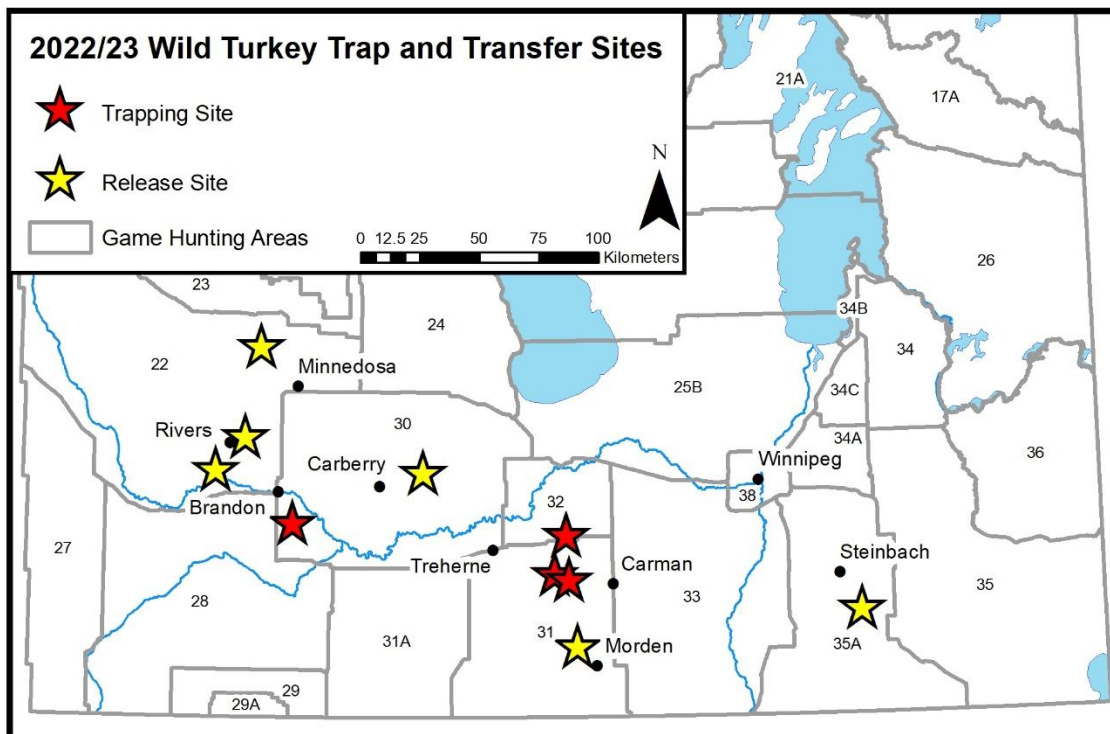


Table 1: Manitoba 2022/23 Wild Turkey Trapping Information.

Site	Game Hunting Area	Total Birds Captured	Trapping Dates
St. Claude	32	35	December 19; January 3 & 6
Stephenfield 1	31	74	December 19; January 3; February 8, 15 & 28; March 8
Stephenfield 2	31	65	February 8, 15 & 28; March 8
Brandon Hills	30	79	March 8
Total		253	

Releases

A total of 243 wild turkeys were released at six introduction sites in winter 2022/23 (Figure 1). Traditionally wild turkeys are not released into new areas until late-winter, unless an existing flock is present and weather conditions are favorable, as was the case with the Morden site. Releases occurred in four different Game Hunting Areas (GHAs), all with spring and fall wild turkey hunting seasons. All turkeys were fitted with leg bands prior to release to collect data on dispersal, harvest rates, and potentially population size over time. One banded turkey escaped during handling at the holding facility in Brandon, which is in close proximity to the site where it was initially trapped.

Table 2: Manitoba 2022/23 Wild Turkey Release Information.

Site	Game Hunting Area	Total Birds Released	Adult Male	Juvenile Male	Adult Female	Juvenile Female	Release Dates
Morden	31	56	8	21	15	12	December 19; January 3 & 6
Rivers 1	22	30	7	1	14	8	March 9
Rivers 2	22	40	11	2	16	11	March 9
Steinbach	35A	40	10	5	7	18	March 15
Basswood	22	32	4	4	10	14	March 24
Sidney	30	45	7	3	21	14	March 29
Total		243	47	36	83	77	

Discussion

The province intends on releasing wild turkeys at sites for a minimum of three years after the first introduction to account for annual differences in spring dispersal, mortality, and productivity, with the goal of establishing an abundant population over time. Landowner tolerance for overwintering turkeys should also be considered when planning continued releases at individual sites. 2022/23 was the first release in the Steinbach and Sidney areas, although low densities of turkeys were known to already occur in both areas. These sites are recommended as a priority for relocated turkeys in 2024 and 2025.

Wild turkeys continue to be released along the Little Saskatchewan River valley (Rivers 1, Rivers 2, and Basswood sites), which date back to releases starting in 2011. Additional releases can be considered in future years until the regional population reaches desired densities.

The Morden site is located ~3 km from the location where wild turkeys were initially introduced to Manitoba in the late-1950s, and within a GHA that contributes a high proportion of Manitoba's annual hunter harvest. However, anecdotal evidence suggested that the local population declined in recent years, prompting requests from the local game and fish associations for translocated birds. A release was also conducted at this site in winter 2021/22, and another site ~6 km west of it in 2019/20. This site is recommended as a lower priority for releases in future years than the other ongoing sites.

Seven wild turkeys died during trapping activities or in captivity during 2022/23, with necropsies conducted by the Manitoba Veterinary Diagnostic Services Lab concluding that three of the birds that died in captivity exhibited injuries associated with trampling or fighting. These 2022/23 occurrences stress the need for attention to proper handling, assessing the appropriate number of birds placed in holding facilities at any one time, and the desire to remove birds from captivity as early in the spring as weather permits, prior to the peak of breeding activity. There were also slight discrepancies between the number of birds trapped and those eventually released, stressing the importance of regular communication between staff and volunteers. Branch staff plan to meet with volunteers to go over 2023/24 trapping plans and holding facility maintenance prior to the winter trapping season.

Acknowledgements

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