MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Wild Turkey (Either-sex)
Region: 4
Hunting District: All Counties in R4
Year: 2027

1. **Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.).**

   The proposed regulation would expand the **FALL** Either-sex (ES) wild turkey license 499-00 license to **ALL** of Region 4. From 2025 to present, this license was only valid in Fergus and Petroleum Counties. Season dates Sept 1 - Jan 1. Proposed 2027 regulation as follows (in RED):

   Region 4 Turkey License
   Note: Valid in Region 4.

License	Licenses per Hunter	Season Dates	Opportunity	Opportunity specific details
499-00	1	Sept 01 – Jan 01	Either-sex Wild Turkey	Valid in Region 4 ~~portions of Fergus and Petroleum Counties~~

   From 2022-2024, fall turkey hunting in Region 4 was closed by design to allow for turkey augmentations and population expansion in the Region, having only a spring general spring license (tom) opportunity. In 2025, a new fall Either-sex turkey license (499-00) was established in the Region 4 portion of Fergus and Petroleum Counties to address increasing turkey numbers. The remainder of Region 4 was continued to be closed to fall turkey hunting. As stated above, this proposed regulation would allow the fall 499-00 license to be valid in **ALL** of Region 4.

2. **What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

   The objective of this proposal is to increase turkey hunting and harvest opportunities in Region 4 experiencing localized turkey population issues, including problematic concentrations of wild turkeys and game damage complaints.

3. **How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints.**

   The success of this proposal will be measured by fewer wild turkey-related game damage complaints over time and a slight reduction in population in these Counties. Harvest questionnaires will continue to be sent to the 499-00 license holders to evaluate effort and harvest success.

4. **What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest or other pertinent information).**

   For almost 20 years, Region 4 Wildlife staff have been actively working to establish and/or augment turkey populations in areas with suitable habitat via trapping and transplanting efforts. Early efforts focused on creating new populations along the Missouri, Teton and Marias River corridors. Soon after releases and subsequent increasing numbers, a limited entry spring turkey permit (no fall season) was created in 2012 in Cascade County and 2014 in Chouteau/Teton Counties. Eastern Region 4 remained a general season during this time. Efforts then shifted to suitable habitat within riparian or mountainous ecological systems in central Region 4. Augmentations supplemented existing low-density populations following severe winters of 2018-2020. Spring nesting has been quite successful and winter mortalities have been isolated to a few years and areas, allowing for continued population growth and expansion. Following this curve, a general spring season valid in all Region 4 was implemented in 2022, meanwhile the fall either-sex turkey season was excluded while populations continued to be augmented.

Turkey numbers in the Fergus and Petroleum county portions of the Region were never as low as other areas, and numbers have increased in recent years. This is also evidenced by most turkey harvest in Region 4 occurring in Fergus and Petroleum Counties. Prior to 2022, ~71% of all turkey harvest was accounted for by Fergus and Petroleum Counties alone. Since 2022 and the season change, still almost half (49%) of all turkey harvest occurs in theses two counties. Turkey harvest has spread out across more of the region with turkey population expansion and hunting opportunity has increased over time. Wild turkey harvest information is somewhat limited via FWP harvest surveys. Utilizing a specific over-the-counter (OTC) fall-only license allows biologists to assess number of licenses purchased and obtain more precise harvest and effort information via harvest questionnaires.

Table 1. Turkey harvest in Region 4.

Year	Total	Males	Females		Spring	Fall	% Harvest in Fall	% Female Harvest of Total
2008	328	275	53		193	135	41.2%	16.2%
2009	291	263	28		208	83	28.5%	9.6%
2010	278	232	38		187	91	32.7%	13.7%
2011	186	149	37		96	89	47.8%	19.9%
No harvest data 2012-2014								
2015	251	208	38		126	125	49.7%	15.3%
2016	429	378	43		263	166	38.7%	10.0%
2017	315	278	34		226	89	28.2%	10.7%
2018	462	328	118		190	272	58.8%	25.6%
2019	400	306	78		225	175	43.7%	19.4%
2020	575	486	78		374	200	34.9%	13.5%
2021	555	483	47		424	131	23.6%	8.5%
2022	624	574	44		521	103	16.5%	7.0%
2023	251	208	38		126	125	49.7%	15.3%
2024	820	758	47		682	138	16.9%	5.8%
2025	935	866	53		747	188	20.1%	5.7%
Average prior to 2022	370	308	54		228	141	38.2%	14.5%
Average since 2022	658	601	45		519	138	21%	6.9%

Table 2. Region 4 Fergus & Petroleum Counties.

Year	Total	Males	Females	Spring	Fall	% Harvest in Fall	% Female Harvest of Total
2008	305	251	54	175	130	42.6%	17.7%
2009	267	239	28	191	76	28.5%	10.5%
2010	253	211	33	174	79	31.2%	13.0%
2011	164	128	35	84	80	48.8%	21.3%
No harvest data 2012-2014							
2015	202	165	32	99.6	102	50.7%	15.8%
2016	331	289	34	198	133	40.2%	10.2%
2017	166	150	16	117	49	29.7%	9.3%
2018	307	211	86	119	189	61.4%	28.1%
2019	275	190.6	71	132	143	51.9%	25.9%
2020	360	289.6	59	215	145	40.2%	16.5%
2021	245	213.8	29	182	62	25.4%	8.9%
2022	226	207	16	192	34	15.2%	6.9%
2023	202	165	32	100	102	50.7%	15.8%
2024	364	344	11	314	50	13.7%	3.2%
2025	467	432	23	367	100	21.5%	4.9%
Average prior to 2022	261	213	43	153	108	41.3%	16.3%

Average since 2022	315	287	20	243	72	23%	6.5%
Avg % Region 4 Harvest occurring in Fergus/Petroleum Counties							
Prior to 2022	70.6%	69.1%	79.4%	67.1%	76.4%		
Since 2022	47.8%	47.7%	44.9%	46.8%	51.8%		

Total turkey harvest in Region 4 has steadily increased with increasing turkey populations and expansion, along with license opportunities. In 2020, 400 turkeys were harvested, steadily increasing to 821 in 2024, and 935 in 2025 (via harvest surveys). This indicates steady population growth and expansion.

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and non-resident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Central Montana experienced extreme drought from 2019-2022 coupled with two severe winters. While game species experienced population declines during this time, turkey numbers in Fergus and Petroleum counties took a small dip but began to quickly increase soon thereafter. Based on staff observations, anecdotal reports, harvest reports and landowner complaints, numbers appear to be doing very well. Since 2022, multiple years of milder winters, good spring poult production and abundant grasshopper/insect production have contributed to this population increase in much of Region 4. Fall turkey hunting is primarily limited to private lands as turkeys head to wintering areas, where access can be limited at times. Some landowners are enrolled in FWP's Block Management program offering turkey hunting access to private and accessible public lands. The license would provide a means for landowners to manage turkeys on their properties having increased populations yet not be likely to significantly reduce turkey populations in the immediate area. Interest in turkey hunting has steadily increased in the region as populations have grown and expanded as evident in harvest surveys.

6. **Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

Landowners approached about this proposal are in support. While staff have not spoken to any landowners who've opposed the proposal, those opposed would not have to participate in fall turkey hunting on their properties. Area hunters are in support of this proposal; many did not wish to see the fall turkey season opportunity removed in 2022. Region 4 area game wardens are also in full support. The proposal was discussed at length with the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) Regional Biologist, receiving full endorsement.

Submitted by: Cory Loecker, Region 4 Wildlife Manager

Date: 10/12/2026

Approved: _____
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: _____
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: