

The Basics of Turkey Hunting in Washington



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Wildlife Program
Hunter Education Division

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Introduction

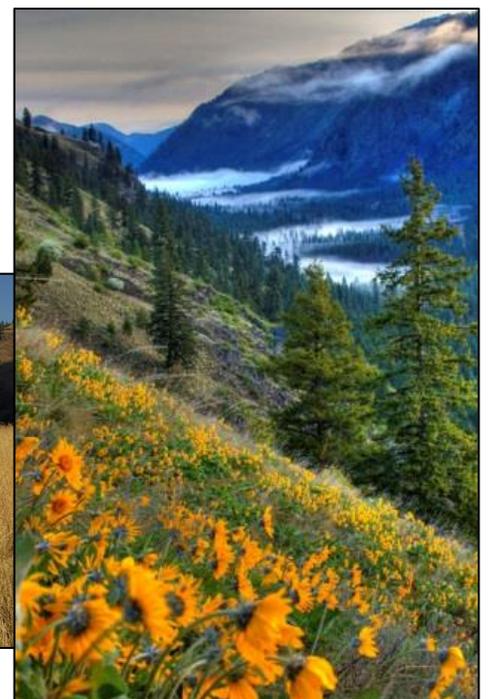
Welcome to turkey hunting! This course should prepare you for basic turkey hunting and give you a general guide to be successful. It should also serve to help you in your hunting pursuits. This manual was designed to give you a basic overview of turkey hunting in Washington State. The information contained in this manual will teach you about each of the three subspecies of turkey available for harvest in Washington.

This guide will also help teach you about game handling, hunting implement regulations and choices, correct shot placement, and hunter reporting. These topics will help make you a more successful hunter and make the animals you harvest become great table fare.

One thing to remember when pursuing any animal is that it is called hunting for a reason. You may not be successful in harvesting an animal every day, or every season. If you look at the harvest statistics for turkey hunters in 2014, you can see that the majority were unsuccessful.

Season	Harvest	Hunters	Hunter Success
Fall	1,489	3,424	43.5%
Spring	3,743	11,153	33.6%
Total	5,232	14,577	35.9%

Hunting shouldn't be all about the harvest of animals. It should be about the experience and time spent afield. Like bonding with family members and friends over a great trip, watching the sunrise over the mountains on a crisp fall morning, seeing a tom turkey strutting, and being able to have stories that excite all of those you tell.



License Choices

There are many different licenses you can choose that give you the opportunity to hunt for turkey. All of the license choices give you the ability to hunt other animals as well. You can always add other licenses to your license, but you would have to pay the price of that license item itself. If you purchase a license package, you receive a discount. To hunt turkey in Washington, you need to have a small game license and a turkey transport tag.

License choices are as follows:

- Small Game License
 - Allows you to hunt small game like upland birds and rabbits, as well as unclassified animals such as coyote.
- Any of the big game combos with the discounted small game license
 - Allows you to hunt the big game species denoted by the license, small game, and unclassified animals.

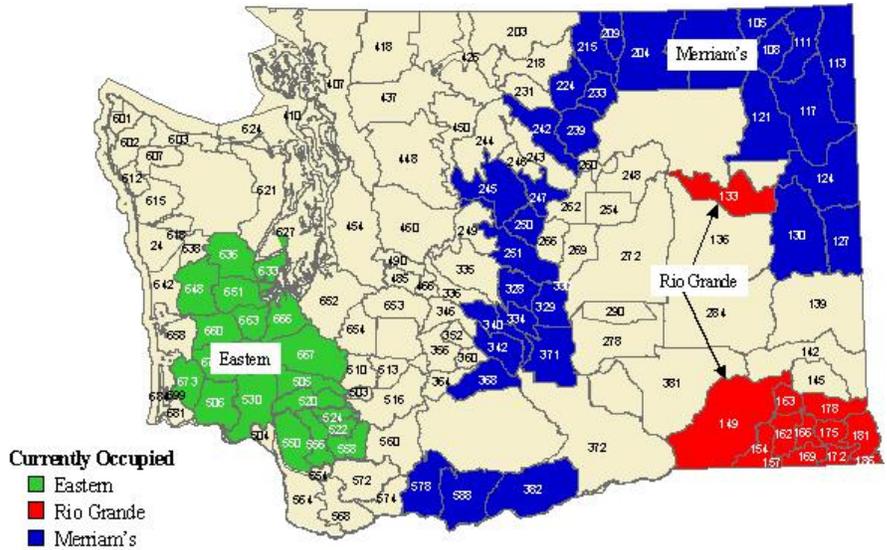
To hunt turkeys you must also purchase a turkey transport tag. You can harvest up to seven turkeys during the course of the hunting season. Three turkeys can be harvested during the spring season from April to May, three additional turkeys may be harvested in early fall season in some GMUs, and one more turkey can be harvested in the late fall season. Remember that you cannot turn tags in for refunds, so you may want to buy as you hunt. Tags purchased during the spring season can be used in the fall season, since the tags are not tied to a specific season.

Turkey tag purchasers are required to report their turkey tags before the deadline of January 31. There is a section at the end of this booklet that provides you step by step instructions on how to report your tags.



Turkey subspecies

Washington State is home to three sub-species of turkey. They are the Eastern, Merriam's, and Rio Grande. In 1960, Merriam's turkeys were introduced into NE and south central Washington State for hunting purposes. Since then, WDFW has introduced Eastern, Merriam's, and Rio Grande subspecies to other suitable parts of the state. They now can be found in five of the six regions recognized by WDFW. Region 4 is the only area that does not have turkeys. To the right is a map of the turkey range in Washington.



Eastern

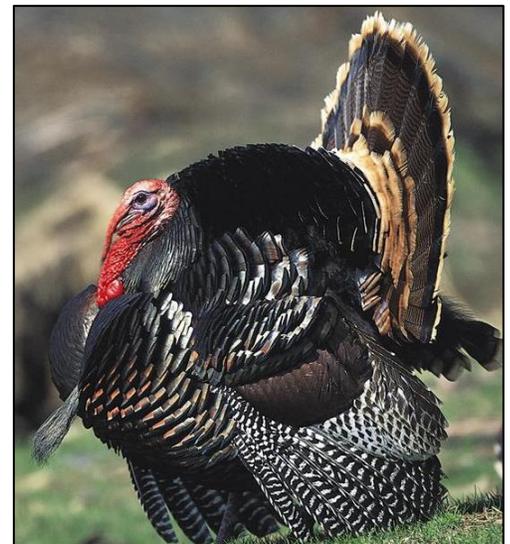
The eastern subspecies was transplanted to Washington from the eastern United States. These turkeys like to live in forests with a mix of evergreen and deciduous trees. The trees they like to use are Douglas fir, western hemlock, western red cedar, red alder, and big leaf maple. They also like to eat the soft mast of Pacific dogwood, hawthorn, Oregon grapes, huckleberries, blackberries, cherries, and crab apples. The Eastern wild turkey is found in western Washington and only about 50 are harvested each year.

- Chestnut brown tail coverts
- Tail feather tips are buff or chocolate brown
- Adults may weigh 25 lbs. or more

Merriam's

Merriam turkeys are native to the coniferous mountains and canyons of Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. They live in the canyons and forests of northeast and central Washington. These turkeys prefer forests that contain ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, western white pine, Engelman spruce, Douglas maple, willows, cottonwoods, and aspens. In Washington, they eat grass leaves and seeds, ponderosa pine seeds, acorns, grasshoppers, forbs, and fruits like wild strawberries. Also, they prefer to roost in Douglas fir and grand fir trees.

- White or buff tail coverts
- Nearly white tail tips
- May weigh up to 25 lbs.





Rio Grande

Texas, Kansas, and Oklahoma are the native stomping grounds for the Rio Grande turkey. These are the only species in Washington that prefers to nest within .25 miles of a permanent water source. Their winter roost sites are normally in wooded streamside areas. They eat insects, grass and sedge seed heads, hackberry, prickly pear, fruit and seeds of various shrubs, and the foliage and forbs of grasses. The Rio Grande turkey is found from Spokane and Lincoln counties south into the Blue Mountains of Washington.

- Light brown tail coverts
- Buff/tan tail tips
- Legs appear longer than other varieties

General Turkey Information

Tracks

Turkey tracks can be found in snow, soft mud, or light dirt areas. Their track is very distinctive. It is about four inches long, characterized by three long toes that face forward, and one little toe that faces back, about one inch. The middle toe of the hen is smaller (less than 2 ½ inches) than a mature tom (more than 2 ½ inches). When strutting, toms will also leave wing drag marks.



Food and Feeding Habits

Wild turkeys will eat just about anything that provides them with nutrition. They will eat fresh green vegetation, seeds, fruit, invertebrates, plants, and sometimes small lizards or frogs. A field full of grasshoppers in turkey country is sure to attract birds. Turkeys feed right after flying down from the roost and continue to feed all day.



Hen
Droppings



Tom
Droppings

Droppings

Turkey droppings somewhat resemble goose droppings and can be useful in determining the gender of the bird who left it behind. They are similar in size but not always in color. Hen droppings are usually a single pile while a tom usually leaves an elongated “J” shaped dropping about two inches long. Finding droppings may signify that this area is being used by turkeys. But it also may mean that they just passed through. Try a locator call or soft clucks and yelps if you find a lot of droppings to see if there are turkeys in the area. If you find a lot of droppings below a tree, you may have found the roost tree. Make sure to take note of where the tree is so you can use the knowledge to your advantage.

Roosting areas

Turkeys generally roost in trees. However during nesting season, some hens may stay on the nest to protect the eggs. During the summer, most roost areas are 30-100 foot trees that are close to where the birds have been feeding. Winter roosts seem to be more deliberate and the turkeys generally use traditional night time roosts. They like to use the largest trees in a grove and tend to roost as near to the top of the tree as comfortably possible. Hunting birds at the roost site may disrupt normal patterns and is not recommended. Set up about 70 or more yards from a roost site and call the birds to you when hunting.

Hunting Implements

Legal hunting implements for turkey hunting are limited to shotgun, muzzleloading shotgun, archery, or crossbow in Washington. This section details legal hunting implements at the time of the writing of this booklet.

Shotguns

Shotguns are the most widely used implement when hunting turkeys. Any shotgun can make a good turkey gun as long as it shoots straight and can have a full or extra full choke. The choke helps group the shot together. Some shotguns have interchangeable choke tubes and a threaded barrel that allows shooters to change their shotgun's choke based on their needs for shooting/hunting. If your shotgun does not have an interchangeable choke there are some ammunition companies that have developed turkey loads that are designed for use without super tight chokes. Hunters must use #4 shot or smaller (e.g., #6 shot is legal) to hunt turkey. Remember that the larger the number of shot, the smaller it is.

It is unlawful to hunt game birds, including turkey, with a shotgun capable of holding more than three shells. Make sure your shotgun holds three or fewer shells. If it is designed to hold more than three, the manufacturer should have also supplied a magazine plug to fill the space to only allow the three rounds.

Muzzleloading shotguns

Muzzleloaders come in all makes and models. No matter who manufactures the muzzleloader, it has to meet the following criteria to be legal to hunt wild turkey within Washington State:

- Muzzleloader: A firearm that is loaded from the muzzle and uses black powder or a black powder substitute.
- A muzzleloading firearm shall be considered loaded if a powder charge and a projectile, either shot or single projectile, are in the barrel and the barrel or breech is capped or primed.
- It is unlawful to hunt wildlife using a muzzleloading firearm that does not meet the following specifications:
 - A muzzleloading shotgun must have a single or double barrel
 - A muzzleloading shotgun used for turkey must shoot #4 or smaller shot.

- Persons lawfully hunting small game with a double barrel, muzzleloading shotgun may keep both barrels loaded.

Muzzleloaders are a great way to hunt with an implement that has been around for hundreds of years. With muzzleloaders, make sure you use a black powder or black powder substitute that is rated for your muzzleloader. If you use the incorrect powder, it could be disastrous. Some other helpful safety hints include:

- Never fill the muzzleloader directly from the powder can as it could spark and ignite the powder in the can.
- Mark your ramrod when the muzzleloader is empty so you can make sure it is empty upon storage.
- Be sure to seat the wad and shot directly on top of the powder charge.
- Store powder and percussion caps in separate dry and cool places.

Beware of what is known as a hang fire. This happens when the trigger is pulled, the percussion cap ignites, but the firearm does not go off. Make sure to keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction for at least 30 seconds. If it still does not fire in that 30 seconds, put on another cap or re-prime the pan, and fire again. Make sure the nipple is clean on percussion locks.

Archery equipment

Archery equipment consists of many types of bows that are commercially available today. All of these bows have to meet the following criteria to be used to hunt wild turkey in Washington State.

- Mechanical broadheads are legal to use for all archery hunting.
- It is unlawful to have any electrical equipment or electric device(s) except for illuminated nocks, attached to the bow or arrow while hunting.
- It is unlawful to shoot a bow and arrow from a vehicle or from, across or along the maintained portion of a public highway.
- It is unlawful to use any device secured to or supported by the bow for the purpose of maintaining the bow at full draw or in a firing position.
- It is unlawful to hunt wildlife with any bow equipped with a scope.

Bows can generally be placed in one of two categories, compound or traditional. Compound bows are the most popular hunting bow because of their ease of use. The mechanics of the bow allow for the shooter to more easily draw and hold than the traditional bows. The compounds have what is called let off. At a certain point in the draw, the draw weight is reduced by as much as 85%. These bows are always strung and ready to go.

Traditional bows are either Long Bows or Recurve Bows. There is no mechanical let off when holding these bows at full draw. However, these bows are just as effective at harvesting animals as compound bows (if you are proficient with them). These bows have to be strung

before use because if you kept the bow strung it would lose power by forming to the strung position.

There are several types of arrows available for hunters, generally constructed of wood, aluminum, or carbon fiber. Refer to the manufacturers table to determine which arrow type and size fit your bow and shooting conditions. If you are unsure of the arrows to purchase, consult with an archery retailer, and they can help determine which is appropriate for your bow. Broadheads should be used when hunting with archery equipment. These also come in many different shapes and sizes.

There is also a broadhead that has outstretched blades designed to be shot at the neck region. These are called guillotine broadheads. Guillotine broadheads are designed to decapitate the turkey, hence the name. These should only be used if you are 100% confident that you can accurately hit the target. You may want to purchase the same weight broadhead as the field points you are using for target practice to minimize sight adjustment in your bow.

Crossbows

- Crossbows were made legal to hunt with in 2015. These implements are gaining popularity amongst hunters because of their accuracy and speed. It is unlawful to discharge a crossbow from a vehicle or from, across, or along the maintained portion of a public highway.
- Mechanical broadheads are legal to use for all archery hunting.
- Guillotine broadheads can also be used with crossbows.

Where to Go

Finding hunting access on private lands in Washington State is becoming more of a challenge. However, there are still a number of options available to hunters on public land. WDFW's wildlife areas are good places to start. WDFW also has a lot of private landowners who have signed up to allow public hunting access on their lands. These lands can be found on the WDFW website as part of the Private Lands Hunting Access program.

Also on the website is an online mapping tool called "GoHunt." This system allows hunters to print their own maps and use them in the field, and also breaks down the hunting success of several species into a visual map. This tool can be found online at <http://apps.wdfw.wa.gov/gohunt/>.

If hunters want to gain access to private property, they should do some scouting of their desired area and locate lands they might want to hunt. Once a hunter has located properties to hunt, he or she can knock on the door of the landowner. If the hunter can't locate a house, landowner contact information can be obtained from the county tax assessor office. Landowners may refuse to grant permission. If they do refuse access, make sure to thank them for their time. Hunters who are persistent in their search will most likely gain access to some

lightly hunted areas and make new friends along the way. Other options include hunt clubs and hiring a guide who has access to private farms and ranches.

The department's website contains annual hunting prospects that detail WDFW biologist's expectations for hunting for the current year's seasons. These prospects are broken into 17 districts that mark where a particular biologist is responsible. Hunters can find the hunting prospects online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/prospects/>.

Hunting Ethics

All hunters should be hunting ethically. There are many interpretations on ethics and what they mean, but before starting your hunt, think of what you believe is ethical and put it against what the public as a whole may think is ethical. Being ethical hunters will improve public perceptions of hunting and will benefit the sport. WDFW encourages you to raise your ethical bar to the highest level.

Some things that are considered un-ethical in regards to hunting are:

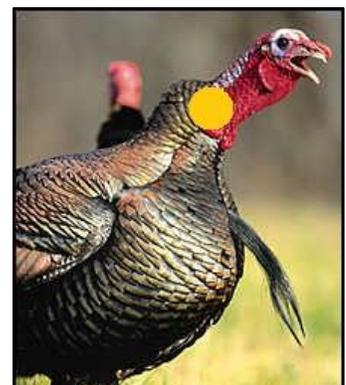
- Shooting at birds when they are outside your hunting implement's effective range.
- Shooting birds while on the land, water, or foliage
- Hogging all of the shots from your hunting party
- Shooting a deer or elk at 1000 yards
- Using a hunting implement that is not properly sighted in

Shot placement

Shot placement is crucial when trying to harvest any animal. As ethical sportsmen and women, we should strive to only take good shots and make the most humane kill. This can be achieved by only shooting when you are 100% confident in the shot. Part of being confident is practicing with your hunting implement before the hunt. Another way to be confident would be to know exactly where to put the shot. Also be sure to note if there are any obstructions between you and the turkey when shooting. A branch or twig can significantly impact a projectile's trajectory. Below are suggested shot locations when harvesting turkey with the two different types of hunting implements.

Shotgun

No matter which shotgun you are using, a head/neck shot is the preferred method for harvesting turkeys. This prevents meat loss due to shooting up the breasts and turning them to hamburger. Aim for the middle of the neck right where the feathers start to appear.





Archery/Crossbow

If you are shooting the guillotine style broadheads that are meant to decapitate the bird, aim just like you were using a shotgun. With regular broadheads you will want to aim for the vitals that are just below the wing joint when broadside, base of the tail when the tom is strutting and facing away, or just above the beard when facing head on.

Hunting Equipment

Concealment

Turkeys have great vision so minimizing movement and being totally concealed is the key. Some hunters use ground blinds to sit in and wait for the turkeys. However, wearing camouflage clothing works equally as well. You will just want to make sure that you are not silhouetted to the turkeys. The number of camouflage patterns and manufacturers is dizzying. Just remember to try to match a pattern with the kind of habitat and climate you are going to hunt. If all else fails, you can use the old style of green, brown, and black camo that is common in popular culture. Remember to camouflage your hands and face as well.

Blinds can be constructed with burlap, 1 x 1's, spray-paint, and some string. Cut the 1 x 1's to about a four foot section. Drill holes in the 1 x 1's and lace the burlap to them. Spray paint the wood to be a dark color and put streaks of green, black, and tan on the burlap. You will then have your own blind that is easy to transport.

Calls

There are many types of calls that can be used for turkey hunting. They generally fall into two types – friction and air operated calls. Most calls are used to simulate the calls of a hen turkey. A couple of calls do imitate the gobbling of a mature tom. However, these calls can also call in other hunters looking to harvest a mature tom and should be used sparingly. Practice makes perfect when using these calls. Take some time, read the directions from the manufacturer, and practice calling when you can. Below are some of the calls that are used for calling turkeys.

Friction calls



Pot and peg call - These calls are also sometimes called slate calls due to the materials traditionally used to construct the striking surface. However, many more materials are being used and produce the same great sound. The call works by causing friction between the striker (the pen looking stick) and the face of the call.

Box call - The box call is aptly named as it is basically a box with a movable lid to make the sounds. Calls are made by putting pressure on the lid and drawing it against the edges of the box.





Push button call - These calls are very easy to operate but sometimes do not give you the versatility of a slate call or box call. Push button calls are generally mounted on the shotgun or crossbow and used for the last few calls. It makes a yelping sound which can cause the turkey to pause and give the hunter their shot.

Air Operated Calls

Diaphragm call - This is the most difficult of the calls to master. Since all you are using is your mouth to make the call function, it can be very frustrating to learn. This method frees your hands up to do other things while calling, such as aiming at a strutting tom. This call requires a lot of practice to become proficient. One trick to practicing is keeping the call in your car. Call to yourself while commuting to work, going to the grocery store, or scouting for any other hunting season.



Wingbone call - The wingbone was traditionally made from the wing bones of the turkey. There are commercially available calls made from plastic materials as well. This call makes yelps and clucks but can be difficult to operate without the proper practice. It does require you to use your mouth to make the call, but does not offer the hands free calling that the diaphragm call offers.

Gobble tube

This call is shaken to produce gobbling type sounds. It can be effective for challenging and bringing in mature toms, but can also call in other hunters.



Locator call

You might have seen crow, owl, hawk, or even peacock calls on the shelves in the sporting goods stores and wondered who in the world is hunting those birds. These are known as locator calls. During the spring months, tom turkeys will gobble at just about any loud, sudden sound. Using a locator call will help locate the turkeys without bringing them to your location. Locating the flock will give you a better idea of where and how to set up once the season begins.

Decoys

Turkey decoys can be effective when hunting. They can attract, distract, challenge, or instill confidence in the turkey you have your eyes on. Decoys come as a Hen, Jake, or Tom. The Hen decoy is great for pulling in toms that are strutting in spring. Jake (immature tom) or small

bodied tom decoys can be used to bring in toms that feel they are challenged for their hens. Some decoy safety tips are:

- Don't carry an uncovered decoy
- Establish a minimum 50 yard line of sight
- Set the decoy about 20 yards out from your blind
- Look before you move
- Call out to an approaching hunter. Do not wave your hand

Optics

Generally you do not need a spotting scope or binoculars for turkey hunting. However, they are helpful to locate birds, observe their movements, or watch them go to their roost.

You will notice optics have a designation such as 8 x 42. These numbers correspond to the construction. The first number is the level of magnification. In the 8 x 42 example, the image is magnified 8 times. The second number is the diameter of the objective lens of the optic. In the 8 x 42 example, the objective lens is 42mm wide. The higher the objective lens, the bulkier the optics can be. However, the larger the objective lens, the clearer the image will be, due to more light entering. You may want to go into a sporting goods store and test out some of the optics before deciding on a specific size or model.

Knives

There are about as many types of knives available in today's sporting goods stores as there are people to buy them. They have many different shapes, uses, designs, and materials. One thing to keep in mind is a sharp knife is a good knife. Any knife can be used to care for your game. However, some are designed specifically for different jobs. When picking a knife, you will want to find something that works for you. Keep a sharpener in your pack for touching up the blade when field dressing the animal.

Tagging

Once you harvest your turkey, be sure to notch and affix your tag to it. Immediately after the animal has been harvested, the tag of the person who has taken the animal must be validated by cutting out and completely removing the month and day of kill. A slit is not acceptable. The tag must be securely attached to the carcass in a visible manner. Washington tags have little holes in the right hand side of the tag. This is a good spot to stick a zip tie through and attach the tag very securely to the turkey's leg.

Game care kit

In your hunting pack you may want to keep some supplies for caring for your game once it is harvested. There are game cleaning kits that have bags for organs and gloves to keep your

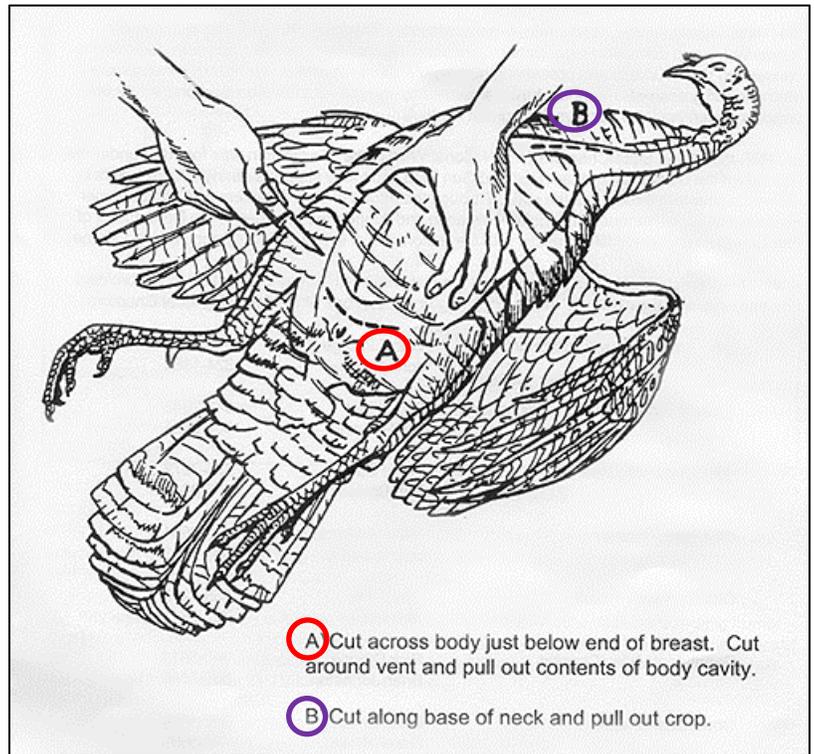


hands clean. If you foresee traveling a great distance to get home, you may want to have a cooler with ice ready to cool the meat and keep it from spoiling.

Field Dressing Turkey

It is unlawful to possess in the field or transport game birds unless a feathered head is left attached to each carcass, except falconry-caught birds. If you are in the field or transporting game birds anywhere after cleaning, remember to keep the feathered head attached.

To clean a turkey, first lay the bird on its back. Follow the breast down to the rear of the bird until it narrows to a point between the legs. Removing some of the feathers in this area will make it easier to clean the bird and help keep the feathers out of the body cavity. Pull up on the tip of the breastbone and cut the bird open by making a shallow horizontal incision (through the skin only) between the tip of the breast and the anus (step A). Make sure to keep the anus attached to the intestines and pull it slightly out of the bird. Then make the incision large enough to insert your hand. Run two fingers along each side of the spine up and under the lungs. Grasp the heart and gizzard and pull out the entrails.



You can remove the crop (a sac filled with what the turkey's been eating) by making a cut on the neck of the turkey and reaching down and removing it (step B). This can be done in the field or at home since there are no fluids that may contaminate the meat. The crop is located at the top of the breast. The crop has a thin membrane so remove it carefully so that you don't break it open. Rinse out the carcass with water and wipe with paper towels if you have these available. It is never recommended to store meat that is wet.

Plucking turkey is a very time intensive task. To make it easier, you can boil water in a large stock pot that will allow the bird to be dipped into the water. Do the dipping outside as the large bird will likely make the stock pot overflow boiling water. Be Careful! This lightly cooks the skin and makes the feathers easier to remove. If you do not have a stock pot that large you can just pluck them without the water.

Remove the feet by cutting around the knee area making sure to sever the tendons. Bend it to the side to make this easier. Discard the feet unless you are feeling adventurous and want to

try bird feet. You may want to save the beard and spurs as a memento of your hunt. Check out you tube for how to save mementos of your turkey hunt.

Once you have the bird plucked, wash the bird and pat it dry. Now you are ready to have some great table fare!

Hunter Reporting

Hunter reporting is an integral part of hunting any animal that requires a tag. It allows WDFW staff to accurately measure the harvest, and coupled with winter surveys of the animal species will help with setting the next year's hunting seasons. Since the information is necessary for WDFW to effectively manage the game animals, this is a mandatory report even if you did not harvest. If you fail to report by the deadline of January 31 then you will be subject to a \$10 administrative penalty. Remember that you have to report on all tags that you purchase except cougar.

Below is a step by step process to report your tags. If you have trouble with the online system, you can also call 877-945-3492 and report by phone.

- Go to fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov
- Under the "I want to Submit" section on the left hand side (Highlighted in Orange), Select "Hunter Report".
- Select the "Submit Report" Box in the top left hand corner of the page.
- Enter all customer information fields. Then click "GO".
- If an error occurs, "customer not found, please try your search again." Verify the information that was entered.
- Select the first species under the "Choose a tag to report on:" section.
- Answer all questions that are on the screen. The questions will change based on the answers provided.
- When completed, the report will issue a message that says, "You have finished the hunter report. Click FINISH to save all of your answers. Click "FINISH" when completed.
- A confirmation page will come up that will show the report has been submitted successfully.
- Write down the submittal date and the confirmation number, this information may need to be referenced at a future date.
- When completed use the Back button on the screen and it will take you back to the page that shows which tags need to be reported on or have been reported.
- Repeat the process for all tags with an outstanding report.
- This information is used to set future hunting seasons in conjunction with WDFW field staff population surveys.

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Ten Basic Safety Rules

1. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction and under control.
2. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to fire. Use your safety, but remember that safeties sometimes fail.
4. Be sure of your target and what lies beyond before firing.
5. Never place or carry a loaded firearm in a motor vehicle.
6. Never use a firearm unless you are familiar with how it works. If you need an owner's manual, write to the manufacturer.
7. Never cross a fence, climb a tree, cross a stream or jump a ditch with a loaded firearm.
8. Never point at anything you do not want to shoot.
9. Unload firearms when not in use. Store firearms and ammunition separately.
10. Never use alcohol (or drugs) before or during shooting.

Learn More about WDFW's Hunter Education Program

Website

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/huntered/>

Email

huntered@dfw.wa.gov

Regional Offices

Region 1 Spokane Office: (509) 892-1001
Region 2 Ephrata Office: (509) 754-4624
Region 3 Yakima Office: (509) 575-2740
Region 4 Mill Creek Office: (425) 775-1311
Region 5 Vancouver Office: (360) 696-6211
Region 6 Montesano Office: (360) 239-4628
Headquarters Olympia Office: (360) 902-8111

More Information

For more information about the Hunter Education Program, contact our staff in Olympia at (360) 902-8111.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

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wdfw.wa.gov

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) receives federal assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and provides equal access to its programs, services, activities, and facilities under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968.

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If you need further assistance or information, please contact the Olympia office of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife: (360) 902-2349, or Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), (360) 902-2207.