Appendix H

Specific Management Recommendations for Rio Grande Wild Turkeys

Rio Grande Turkey - southwest portion of Post Oak Savannah Ecoregion and western portions of the Blackland Prairies, with Eastern Turkey - remaining portion of Post Oak Savannah

Rio Grande turkeys are present in some of the southwestern counties of the Post Oak area and some bottoms in the western Blackland Prairies, generally where annual rainfall is below 35 inches. Fairly stable populations have been established in these counties due to suitable habitat and restocking programs by the TPWD. These populations are presently subjected to hunting during the regular fall and/or spring turkey season.

Eastern wild turkeys are currently being restocked in most of the remainder of the Post Oak Savannah and the Pineywoods. Beginning in 1987, using wild-trapped birds from wild eastern turkey populations in the Eastern United States, an intensive restoration effort was begun to restore these native birds to eastern Texas where there was suitable habitat and annual rainfall exceeds 35 inches. This restocking program has been completed, and huntable populations of eastern turkeys in the Post Oak Savannah and Blackland Prairie have been established in several counties, and others may be opened based on annual census activities.

Both of these subspecies of turkeys generally have similar habitat requirements and have similar seasonal habits. Although turkeys are non-migratory resident species, they have large home ranges that change with the season of the year. Turkeys tend to be widely dispersed during the spring and summer nesting/brood-rearing period. Nesting and brood-rearing habitat is similar to that required for quail, but on a larger scale: scattered thickets of low growing brush, patchy residual herbaceous vegetation, a moderately grazed, diverse grass/forb plant community that produces seeds and insects.

After the breeding season, numerous smaller flocks that were widely dispersed during the summer tend to congregate into large winter flocks. The ranges of winter flocks are centered around riparian areas (the flood plains of large creeks and rivers) that have moderately dense stands of tall, full canopied trees. These winter flocks will disperse

several miles from their riparian area roost sites on daily feeding forays. Turkeys are attracted to feeders (not recommended for eastern turkey) and supplemental food plantings provided for deer and quail. The nearness of a ranch to a winter roost site(s), and the availability of a food source, would determine to what extent turkeys are present during the winter months.

Habitat management for the wild turkey concerns the availability of water, food, and cover. The distribution of these key components of the range is of major importance. Turkeys require water daily and can obtain water from foods or free water (ponds, creeks, rivers, etc.) Grassy or brushy nesting and brood-rearing cover is probably the most important cover requirement. Food availability of the native range can be increased by the following activities: (1) Moderately stock the range with domestic animals. (2) Utilize a deferred rotation system of grazing. (3) Control total deer numbers by harvesting does. (4) Prescribed burns can be utilized to retain openings and control regrowth elm, locust, hackberry, pine, and cedar as well as increase production of forbs, grasses and fruit or mast producing browse plants. In summary, range management activities that increase the diversity of grasses, forbs, shrubs, trees, and vines improves the habitat for the wild turkey. These same management practices are also beneficial to deer, quail, and many other wildlife species.

Preservation of roosting sites is a key factor to maintain a turkey population on a sustained basis. Turkey also need escape cover to travel to and from roosting sites. Mature trees utilized as roosting sites include pine, pecan, cypress, sycamore, cottonwood, most large oaks, elm, hackberry, western soapberry, and large mesquite. Dense brush thickets or solid block clearing both furnish poor habitat for the turkey. Clearing programs that leave brush strips between cleared areas are advantageous. Avoid removing hardwood trees such as the various species of oaks, hackberry, elm, or large mesquite. If clearing is needed to improve the range, irregular shaped cleared strips that follow topography are best.