



Cherokee National Forest

Spring Wild Turkey Season

Spring 2021

To many outdoor enthusiasts spring is their favorite time of year. Not just because it is a beautiful time of year, but because that is when wild turkey season begins in the 659,000 acre Cherokee National Forest in east Tennessee.

What many consider the "King of American Game Birds", the wild turkey is very vocal during the spring breeding season. The call (gobble) of the wild turkey in the mountains of east Tennessee is an unforgettable sound. Male turkeys (Tom/gobbler) usually begin attracting female (hen) turkeys by gobbling in late winter and early spring. This thunderous sound is a sure sign that spring is in the air. Gobblers are very competitive and become quite vocal at times.

The 2021 Tennessee statewide spring wild turkey season begins April 3. Many people believe the Cherokee National Forest (CNF) offers the ultimate turkey hunting challenge. The steep rugged terrain and remoteness of much of this area makes it a unique place to hunt. Although turkeys can be found throughout the CNF, they can be difficult to hunt. Much of the CNF is rugged and steep ranging from 1,000' to over 5,000' in elevation. Experienced hunters rely on topographical maps and a compass or a global positioning system unit to make the most of their hunts.

Approximately 50% of the roads within the CNF are closed to vehicles, but are open to foot, bicycle and horse travel unless posted otherwise. Many of the gated roads are maintained as linear wildlife openings that provide food for a variety of wildlife and "bugging" areas for poults (young turkeys.) Insects are an important source of protein for young birds.



Doing pre-season scouting, knowing how to read a map, knowledge of turkey habitat and habits, physical stamina and determination are keys to a successful turkey season in the Cherokee

National Forest (CNF). Hunters often walk ridge tops and closed roads in hopes of hearing a turkey gobble. That's the easy part. When a hunter hears a turkey gobble it often requires a cross-country trek to get into position closer to the bird. This sometimes forces hunters to hike into deep hollows and climb steep rugged slopes. Once a hunter hears a turkey gobble it is not uncommon to hike an hour or more to get close to the bird.

For the determined hunter a typical morning hunt in the CNF can cover several miles. Experienced hunters say there's just no easy way around it - you have to be willing to work hard at turkey hunting in the mountains.

Many people hunt the CNF because of the challenges it offers. Many believe that if it was easy it wouldn't be as rewarding. Harvesting a turkey is only one aspect of a hunt. Using your navigational skills, going into places that many other hunters do not, and enjoying the sights and sounds of the spring woods are all part of why many people hunt the Cherokee National Forest.



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Remember:



Check with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) for specific hunting regulation information.

TWRA offices in Crossville (1-800-262-6704) and in Morristown (1-800-332-0900) can provide this type of information.

- ◆ General national forest information and maps are available at Forest Service offices in Greeneville 423-638-4109 ; Unicoi 423-735-1500 ; Tellico Plains 423-397-8455; Benton 423-338-3300; and Cleveland 423-476-9700; or visit : <http://www.fs.usda.gov/cherokee>
- ◆ Please do not block gate entrances.
- ◆ Always be prepared for the unexpected. Weather can change quickly in the mountains, and much of the area is rugged and remote. Be prepared for unforeseen circumstances.
- ◆ Always be safe with fire. **Never** leave campfires unattended.



Cherokee National Forest is managed by the USDA Forest Service to provide clean water, wood, forage, wildlife and recreation to the nation.

A dedicated and professional group of Forest Service managers, specialists and technicians work diligently to ensure that our precious natural resources are protected and conserved now and for generations to come.

The Forest Service manages the Cherokee National Forest jointly with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency as a Wildlife Management Area.

Each year nearly three million people make visits to the Forest to hunt, fish, camp, hike, boat, sight-see, relax and more.



Forest Service

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