

# New turkey harvest system on tap

BY PHILLIP GENTRY  
FOR THE JOURNAL

Over the last 10 years, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources has been reporting a decrease in the numbers of both whitetail deer and wild turkey in the state. Both deer and turkey are highly popular game animals, the hunting of which carries a substantial economic impact in the millions of dollars to the state.

While this decline is of concern to all user groups, the announcements have led some hunters to question the validity of the accounting systems used by SCDNR to record harvest information. Historically, the department has long relied on randomly selected mail-in harvest information reports that use statistical analysis to arrive at total harvest numbers.

Big-game hunters have long been asking to join other states by instituting an electronic harvest reporting system to provide more accurate accounting of harvest numbers.

According to a SCDNR news release in late December, recent legislation passed by the S.C. General Assembly will allow SCDNR to institute a new electronic harvest system called S.C. Game Check to turkey hunters starting with the 2021 season.

This real-time data will provide a key component in the management of this species. It will also provide wildlife biologists with harvest data on private land versus WMA land. This will aid SCDNR in monitoring harvests and evaluating the impact of season frameworks on turkey populations and hunting success.

"We intend to maintain our mail-in harvest record system for the near future," SCDNR turkey project coordinator Charles



PHILLIP GENTRY | FOR THE JOURNAL

**With the numbers of deer and turkey in South Carolina in decline, the state is poised to benefit from using better technology to account for harvest data.**

Ruth said. "This will help us calibrate the information we already have."

Ruth said he is excited about the prospect of having an electronic harvest system, which will require the hunter to register the kill by a smartphone app or by calling a toll-free telephone number by the end of the day on the same date as the harvest.

At the root of these varied tag data and harvest control measures is an attempt to balance herd/flock and harvest numbers. The first tenant is determining exactly how many animals are harvested each season and balancing that number with the available sustainable harvest of each respective species is a key component to managing the resource.

In 2005, SCDNR discontinued the use of check stations — a network of convenience stores, hardware stores and rural outdoor retailers — that recorded hunter harvests of both deer and turkey. When a hunter harvested an animal, it was required to be checked in at a check station.

The upside of the check stations was that real-time data was recorded

on a daily basis. This data was highly utilized by state biologists for harvest management. The downside was that upwards of 25 percent of harvested animals were not checked. Hunters cited inconvenience or unavailability of check stations when needed.

The new app and telephone system are aimed at increasing the convenience for the hunter as well as providing crucial data for management purposes.

"We don't have specific plans beyond reporting the turkey harvest information at this time, but once we can get the electronic system and telephone system in place, it should make it very easy to add in additional features such as deer harvest reporting and we hope to be able to offer that in the near future," Ruth said.

SCDNR indicated that more information will be made available in the upcoming weeks and months and will be posted on its website and social media pages.

**PHILLIP GENTRY** is the host of PG & Boatgirl Outdoors Podcast. Download the podcast on Apple, Google Play, Spotify or at [pgandboatgirl.com](http://pgandboatgirl.com).