

Ontario's wild turkeys not happy with Harris government

While the provincial government has lined up school boards, municipalities and loose-wheeled truckers in its sights of late, little attention has been given to the plight of the wild turkeys of Ontario.

We're not talking about the tacky wine consumed by tipplers who don't know the difference between a Chardonnay and a Chevrolet. This concerns those feathered, fowl creatures who have long resisted the domestication that has seen their cousins served for dinner on special holidays throughout North America over the past few centuries.

In an attempt, I suppose, to solicit support from at least one segment of Ontario citizenry, the Ministry of Natural Resources has issued a release which can only spell bad news for these beleaguered birds. Ontario's fast growing gaggle of wild turkey hunters can now purchase a licence over the telephone to legally pop their prey. No more driving down to the nearest MNR office in the pickup truck, checking the shotgun at the door, and lining up while the bureaucrats manually and cheerfully process each and every application. The only positive aspect of the old, in-person system was that it gave hunters waiting in line the chance to exchange stories about the one that got away.

The plan to sell licences by Visa via the MNR's new Electronic Licensing Line was announced by Natural Resources Minister Chris Hodgson himself at a receptive gathering at the recent annual meeting of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters in Hamilton. There was no mention of whether or not Hodgson and the federation members assembled there dined on wild turkey bagged by the first hunters to make use of the dial-a-licence pilot project. But it was probably the first time in months that a member of the Mike Harris team was invited to speak at a function where the talk of turkeys didn't involve the government and its cast of characters.

The whole business must be causing wild turkeys from Kenora to Kaladar to cluck with concern. For there are now roughly 12,500 registered wild turkey hunters in



From where I live

Bruce Stapley

Ontario, with approximately 2,000 more of these flak-jacketed sportsmen joining the ranks annually. For turkeys hoping to blend in with politicians, lawyers and other societal outcasts by migrating closer to the province's larger urban centres, it should be pointed out that there are 4,200 wild turkey licenses issued annually in Southern Ontario alone.

The birds can, however, take some solace in the fact that not just any gun toting stiff can head

out to the bush and bang away. No, a would-be candidate must first attend a Wild Turkey Hunter Education Seminar, and then pass an MNR examination. And rumor has it they're really strict about cheat sheets being taken into the examination room. Hunters also need to be in possession of a valid, 15 digit Outdoors Card number. I can only suppose this little piece of plastic allows them to roam free in the great outdoors without a set of golf clubs or a note from their mothers.

Upon finally fulfilling his or her various and sundry obligations, the applicant is then mailed a wild turkey licence, complete with game seal to make it official.

I suppose this is good news to wild turkey hunters from the area as they can now save a few steps on their way out to bag their legal limit. But if I'm not mistaken I'm

sure I saw a gathering of wild turkeys on the edge of the local conservation area the other day looking to protect their interests by nominating a candidate for the upcoming federal election.

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