

Statewide Summary

PHEASANT

As a result of increased breeding populations and excellent nesting conditions, pheasant hunting this fall is expected to be similar to or improved compared to 2015. Kansas continues to maintain one of the best pheasant populations in the country and the fall harvest will again be among the leading states. The best areas this year will likely be in the Northern High Plains (northwest) and Southern High Plains (southwest) regions. While the 2015 pheasant harvest remained depressed, the average daily bag per hunter was above the 10- and 20-year average, suggesting we could have supported a near average harvest with greater hunter participation.

As western Kansas continues to recover from drought conditions, increased production in 2015 led to another significant increase in the breeding pheasant population this year. This included stable or increasing spring populations across all four regions that make up the primary pheasant range. Ample spring moisture created excellent conditions for the 2016 nesting season. As a result of cool and wet spring weather, wheat harvest was delayed and progressed slowly, which typically benefits pheasant production. Despite greatly improved habitat conditions, pheasant densities observed during the 2016 summer brood counts were slightly lower than 2015. However, improved vegetation conditions and extensive rainfall during the survey produced difficult survey conditions that likely impacted surveyors' ability to detect birds. This is supported by improvements in other measures of production, which suggest there was greater nest success in 2016 than in 2015.

QUAIL

Interestingly, the same drought that crashed our game bird populations can be credited for the excellent quail habitat observed following the drought. The resulting weedy grasslands are ideal for quail production, providing both abundant insects and somewhat open grasslands. As a result, the statewide breeding population of quail increased for the third year in a row and was 23 percent greater than in 2015. This increase was expected, given that increases in 2015 roadside surveys were followed by a relatively mild winter. Conditions were again good for production across most of the state in 2016. Roadside surveys showed a statewide increase of 45 percent compared to 2015. Similar to pheasants, overall quail harvest remained low in 2015, but the average daily bag suggested Kansas could have supported a much greater harvest.

PRAIRIE CHICKEN

Prairie chicken populations are improved across many regions that contain the necessary habitat. Hunting opportunities should be good throughout the Greater Prairie Chicken Hunting Unit; however, the best opportunities this fall will be in the Smoky Hills Region, where populations have been increasing and public access is more readily available.

Despite the delisting of the lesser prairie chicken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Southwest Prairie Chicken Unit, where lesser prairie chickens are known to exist, will remain closed to hunting this year. There is still some uncertainty surrounding the short- and long-term plans of the USFWS in regards to any future efforts to change the status of the species.

Forecast Factors

Two important factors impact fall upland game hunting prospects. First is the number of breeding adult birds available for production in the spring. The second is the reproductive success of the breeding population. Reproductive success consists of nest success (the number of nests that successfully hatched) and chick survival (the number of chicks recruited into the fall population). Annual survival of pheasant and quail is relatively low; therefore, the fall population is more dependent on reproductive success than breeding population levels. For prairie chickens, reproductive success is still the major population regulator, although greater annual survival helps maintain hunting opportunities during poor conditions.

This forecast includes information on the breeding populations and reproductive success of pheasants, quail, and prairie chickens. Breeding population data was gathered during spring breeding surveys for pheasants (crow counts), quail (whistle counts), and prairie chickens (lek counts). Data for reproductive success was collected during late-summer roadside surveys for pheasants and quail. Reproductive success of prairie chickens cannot be easily assessed using the same methods because they generally do not associate with roads like pheasants and quail.

Habitat conditions were good to excellent across much of Kansas this year for upland bird production. While early spring was somewhat dry, regular precipitation occurred across the state, beginning in April and continuing throughout the summer. This produced lush vegetation - both in crop fields and rangeland - and stimulated the growth of annual weeds, promoting insect emergence and creating good nesting and brood conditions throughout much of the state. While heavy or poorly-timed rainfall can hurt production by reducing nest success and chick survival, the overall population response to the improved cover conditions this year appears to be good. Winter cover conditions will be good, and with so much cover available, hunters may find it challenging to pinpoint birds.

Given the increased production of upland birds, Kansas should have good upland bird hunting this fall.

2016 Kansas Upland Bird Forecast



YOUTH PHEASANT/QUAIL SEASON
Nov. 5-6, 2016

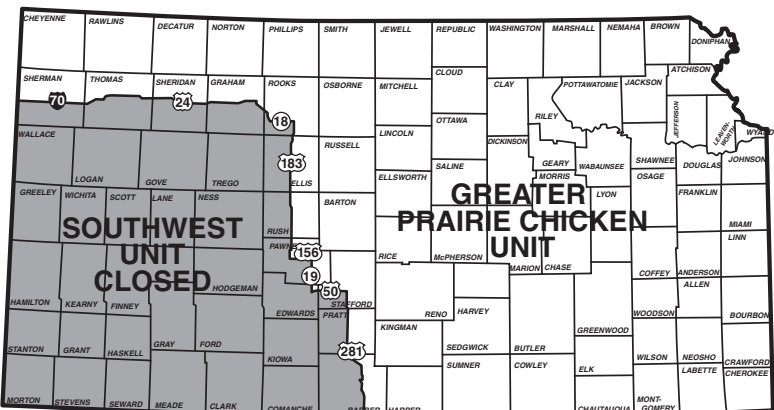
PHEASANT/QUAIL SEASON
Nov. 12, 2016-Jan. 31, 2017

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN SEASONS
Early: Sept. 15-Oct. 15, 2016
Regular: Nov. 19, 2016-Jan. 31, 2017



The Kansas Upland Bird Forecast,
regulations and other hunting
information are available at ksoutdoors.com

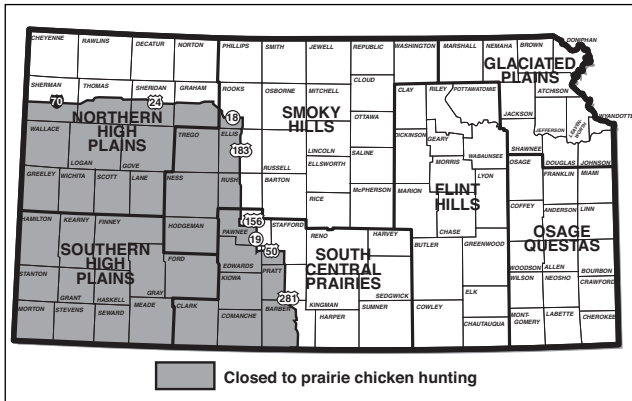
Greater Prairie Chicken Unit



The Southwest Unit is closed to all prairie chicken hunting.

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs described herein is available to all individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, political affiliation, and military or veteran status. Complaints of discrimination should be sent to Office of the Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, 1020 S Kansas Ave., Topeka, KS 66612-1327. 09/16

Regional Forecasts



Northern High Plains/Northwest

Pheasant – Average daily bags were relatively good last year and with similar brood survey values and improved production, hunting opportunities should be similar to improved throughout most of this region. Highest densities will be found in the northwestern portion and southern tier of counties in the region. This region showed a moderate increase in spring densities of pheasants but remained well below average. Observed pheasant roadside densities were similar to 2015. However, measures of production suggest pheasant production was much better this year. The Northern High Plains was one of two regions with the highest regional pheasant index on the brood survey this year.

Quail – This area is at the extreme northwestern edge of bobwhite range in Kansas and densities are relatively low compared to central Kansas. Hunting opportunities in this region are limited and quail are predominantly taken opportunistically by pheasant hunters. The best areas will be in northeastern counties with adequate woody cover. Densities on the summer brood count significantly increased this year, but remain the lowest regional density in the state.

Prairie Chicken – Prairie chicken populations have expanded in both numbers and range within the region over the past 20 years. Lesser prairie chickens occur in the southern and central portions of the region and these areas will be closed to prairie chicken hunting this year (see map for unit boundaries). In areas still open to prairie chicken harvest, greater hunting opportunities will be found in the northeastern portion of the region in native prairies and nearby CRP grasslands.

Smoky Hills/Northcentral

Pheasant – Opportunities are expected to remain fair to good this year. The western half of the region contained relatively good densities, with highest densities found in the southern tier of counties. The Smoky Hills spring breeding population remained unchanged from 2015. Spring precipitation created good nesting conditions again this year. Measures of production suggest this region had improved nest success and the greatest of any region this year. Despite improved production, roadside counts decreased by 31 percent compared to 2015.

Quail – Areas within the northcentral and southcentral portion of this region appear to hold the best densities for hunting this fall. Reports throughout the region suggest fair to good quail numbers and given habitat conditions, quail hunting should be good across most of the region this year. Spring breeding populations improved in the region again this year, increasing by 40 percent. Following excellent production conditions this summer, brood survey results increased by 92 percent compared to 2015. Quail populations in northcentral Kansas are normally spotty; however, they should be more consistent this year across the landscape within appropriate habitat.

Greater Prairie Chicken – Greater prairie chickens occur throughout the Smoky Hills where large areas of native rangeland are intermixed with CRP. The best hunting will likely be found in the central portion of the region but several other counties also hold relatively high densities of birds. Lesser prairie chickens occur in a few counties in the southwestern portion of the region where prairie chicken hunting is closed. This region includes some of the highest densities and greatest hunting opportunities in the state for greater prairie chickens. Improved rangeland conditions resulting from a combination of increased precipitation and lower cattle stocking rates following the drought should have positive impacts on densities this fall.

Glaciated Plains/Northeast

Pheasant – Good hunting opportunities will exist only in pockets of habitat, primarily in the northwestern portion of the region or areas managed for upland birds. Spring crow counts this year indicated breeding populations of pheasants remained similar to 2015. Roadside surveys indicated a 47 percent decrease in densities compared to 2015. Pheasant densities across the region are typically low, especially compared to other areas in western Kansas.

Quail – Hunting opportunities in the region are expected to be better than last year and the best areas should be in the northwestern portion of the region. Quail observations during the brood survey doubled this year compared to 2015. This increase occurred despite the significant decrease in the spring survey index. While urbanization and large-scale succession in the area have deteriorated the habitat and caused long-term population declines, quail densities should be the highest they've been in a number of years.

Greater Prairie Chicken – Very little prairie chicken range occurs in this region and opportunities are limited. The greatest opportunity for encounters are in the western edges of the region along the Flint Hills, where some large areas of native rangeland still exist.

Osage Questas/Southeast

Pheasant – This region is outside the primary pheasant range and very limited hunting opportunity is available. Pheasants are occasionally found in the northwestern portion of the region in very low densities.

Quail – While a greater percentage of the total harvest of quail are harvested in western regions of Kansas, success rates of hunters targeting this area were higher than western regions in 2015. Areas where birds were found last year should again offer fair hunting opportunities, with the best opportunities in western counties along the Flint Hills and in the southcentral portion of the region. Though long-term trends have been declining, breeding populations have been steadily increasing in this region over the last decade, resulting in another slight increase this year. Production in the region was depressed, with production indices suggesting the lowest regional nest and brood success. This was likely due to heavy rainfall, particularly in July. Despite poor production, densities from brood surveys remained relatively stable, most likely from carryover adult birds from the spring.

Greater Prairie Chicken – Greater prairie chickens occur in the central and northwest portions of this region in large areas of native rangeland. The best hunting opportunities will be in large blocks of native rangeland, primarily located along the edge of the Flint Hills region. Populations have been in consistent decline over the long term. Infrequent fire has resulted in woody encroachment of native grasslands in the region, gradually reducing the amount of suitable habitat.

Flint Hills

Pheasant – This region is on the eastern edge of pheasant range in Kansas and is outside the primary range of the species. The best opportunities will be found in the northwest portion of the region. Pheasant densities have always been relatively low throughout the Flint Hills, and highest densities are typically found on the western edge of the region. The spring breeding population index remained relatively stable this year, with the summer brood survey indicating a slight decrease in summer densities.

Quail – Quail densities will likely be limited in the core of the Flint Hills where large-scale annual burning and chemical control of shrubs has removed key components of quail habitat. However, the remainder of the Flint Hills should maintain good hunting opportunities this fall. There was a 26 percent increase in the index of breeding bobwhites this spring, resulting in a very strong breeding population. Brood survey results indicated densities were similar to slightly decreased compared to 2015. As prescribed burning of rangeland intensified this year, lack of nesting cover resulted in reduced nest success.

Greater Prairie Chicken – Hunting opportunities will likely be slightly reduced from last year throughout the region. The Flint Hills is the largest intact tallgrass prairie in North America. It has served as a core habitat for greater prairie chickens for many years. Since the early 1980s, inadequate range burning frequencies have gradually degraded habitat quality and prairie chicken numbers have declined as a result. The annual burning practice in the core of the Flint Hills has returned, limiting available nesting cover in the region. As a result, production in the core of the Flint Hills was lower than recently observed.

Southcentral Prairies

Pheasant – Anecdotal reports and other survey efforts suggest there may still be ample birds in the region for the upcoming season. Opportunities are expected to remain similar to last year, though somewhat unpredictable, the highest pheasant densities will be in the northwestern portion of the region. The spring pheasant crow survey index indicated a 21 percent increase from 2015. However, the summer brood survey suggests a slight decrease compared to 2015. Measures of production were slightly lower than last year and may have been impacted by the timing of rainfall. Decreases were not anticipated in this region after spring increases with good nesting conditions.

Quail – Greatest densities will be found in the southwestern and northcentral portion of the region, but hunting should be good throughout the region. The brood survey indicated that there was a nearly 94 percent increase in the density of quail in the region this summer. The increase has returned the region to the highest density of quail in Kansas entering the fall. While other regions may have pockets that hold higher densities of birds, the intermixing of rangeland, CRP, and crop – paired with more consistent woody structure – results in more consistent opportunities in the Southcentral Prairies.

Prairie Chicken – This region is almost entirely occupied by lesser prairie chickens and areas included in their range are closed to prairie chicken hunting this year (see map for unit boundaries). Greater prairie chickens occur in very limited areas in the remainder of this region. Prairie chickens within the open unit in this region will occur in very low densities in the remaining large tracts of rangeland to the northeast.

Southern High Plains/Southwest

Pheasant – Hunting opportunities should be good throughout the region, with the highest densities in the central portion of the region. After record lows two years ago, the breeding population continues to increase dramatically, returning the region to levels observed before the onset of the drought. The summer brood survey indicated densities in the region improved by 73 percent compared to 2015, resulting in the highest densities in the state, along with the Northern High Plains.

Quail – The quail population in this region tends to be highly variable, depending on available moisture and vegetative conditions. Hunting opportunities should be good in the region, with the highest densities in the southeastern portion of the region and along riparian corridors, or other areas where woody structure is available. Quail densities from spring whistle surveys were greatly improved compared to 2015, having the highest regional spring density this year. Widespread, timely precipitation in the area created good conditions for production. Brood survey results indicated a large increase in quail densities. Scaled quail greatly increased in the proportion of observations this year, particularly along the Arkansas River.

Prairie Chicken – This region is largely occupied by lesser prairie chickens. Prairie chicken hunting is closed in this area this year.