

Statewide Summary

PHEASANT

Pheasant hunting in Kansas should be fair to good this year. Excellent conditions in 2016 - combined with high overwinter survival - led to another increase in the pheasant crow survey this year and returned the index to the pre-drought average. This included stable or increasing crow surveys across all four regions in the primary pheasant range. Heavy spring precipitation created excellent habitat for the 2017 nesting season. However, the late snowstorm in western Kansas impacted nest success on initial attempts in a large area. Cool and wet spring weather caused wheat harvest to be delayed and progress slowly, which typically benefits pheasant production. Given good conditions for re-nesting, early losses were overcome, resulting in statewide roadside counts similar to 2016. Given this information, we expect hunters to see similar numbers of birds. While the 2016 pheasant harvest was low, the average daily bag was above average, which suggests an above-average harvest could have occurred if there had been greater hunter participation. 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 half of the Kansas pheasant range.

QUAIL

Quail hunting in Kansas should be good to locally great in 2017. Precipitation patterns observed over the past five years have altered vegetation, increasing both the quality and quantity of habitat and allowing for a modern quail boom. The bobwhite whistle survey in 2017 was the highest recorded since the survey began 20 years ago. These results were expected, given that large increases in 2016 roadside surveys

were followed by a mild winter. Conditions were again good for production across most of the state in 2017, although some regions experienced more extreme conditions. Statewide estimates from roadside surveys remained similar to 2016 with only a slight decrease. Similar to pheasants, overall quail harvest remained low in 2016, but hunter success was high and suggested Kansas could have supported a much greater harvest. With similar roadside survey results, success should remain high for Kansas hunters this year. Kansas maintains one of the best quail populations and the fall harvest will again be among the best in the country. While densities in the eastern-most regions are not as high, all regional indices remain above their respective long-term averages. Opportunities should remain good throughout the state this year, with the best opportunities found in the central regions of the state.

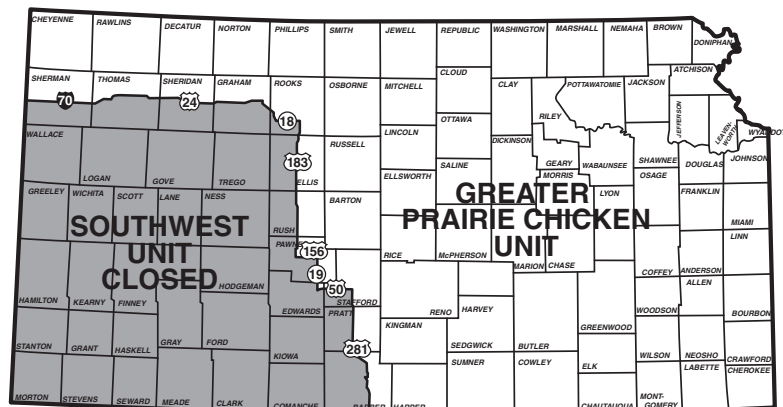
PRAIRIE CHICKEN

Kansas is home to greater and lesser prairie chickens. Greater prairie chickens are found primarily in the tallgrass and mixed-grass prairies that occur in the eastern third and northern half of the state. The Southwest Prairie Chicken Unit, where lesser prairie chickens are found, will remain closed to hunting this year.

All prairie chicken hunters are required to purchase a \$2.50 Prairie Chicken Permit. This permit allows KDWP to better track hunter activity and harvest.

While prairie chicken lek counts were down slightly this year, hunting opportunities should be good throughout the Greater Prairie Chicken Hunting Unit. The best opportunities this fall will be in the Smoky Hills Region, where populations have been increasing and public access is more abundant.

Greater Prairie Chicken Unit



The Southwest Unit is closed to all prairie chicken hunting.

Forecast Factors

Two important factors impact availability of upland game during the fall hunting season: the number of breeding adults available for production in the spring and 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). For pheasant and quail, annual survival is relatively low; therefore, the fall population is more dependent on reproductive success than adult breeding population levels. For grouse (prairie chickens), reproductive success is a major population regulator, but this species' greater annual survival helps maintain hunting opportunities when nesting conditions are poor.

This forecast examines breeding populations and reproductive success of pheasants, quail, and prairie chickens. Breeding population data were gathered during spring surveys for pheasants (crow counts), quail (whistle counts), and prairie chickens (lek counts). Data for reproductive success were 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. However, up to 20 inches of snow fell in portions of the western one-third of the state during a heavy spring snowstorm April 30-May 1, 2017. This storm caused mortality in adult quail and occurred during peak laying for pheasants. Fortunately, temperatures rose and snow melted quickly, preventing major losses of adult pheasants. Overall, good cover and habitat conditions appear to have mitigated poor weather, thereby maintaining stable bird numbers for this fall. Winter habitat will remain good with abundant cover available for birds.

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. 09/17

2017 Kansas Upland Bird Forecast



YOUTH PHEASANT/QUAIL SEASON
Nov. 4-5, 2017

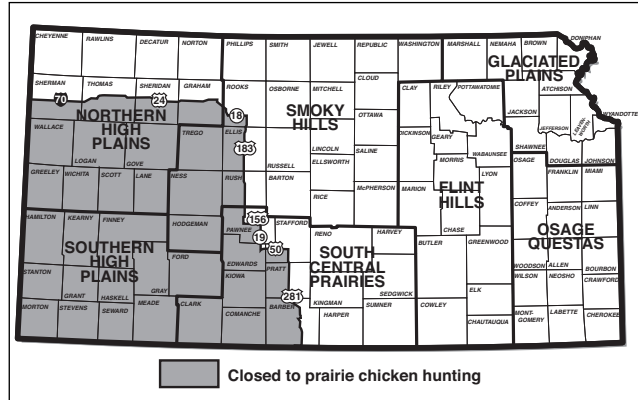
PHEASANT/QUAIL SEASON
Nov. 11, 2017 - Jan. 31, 2018

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN SEASONS
Early: Sept. 15 - Oct. 15, 2017
Regular: Nov. 18, 2017 - Jan. 31, 2018



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

Regional Forecasts



Northern High Plains/Northwest

Pheasant – Pheasant hunting opportunities in the region should remain fair to good. The Northern High Plains maintained the highest regional pheasant index on the roadside survey this year, despite slight declines from 2016. This region had a moderate increase in spring crowing pheasants but remained below average. Production was slightly lower than last year due to late snowfall and excessive summer rainfall. Average daily bags were relatively good last year and with the similar brood survey values, hunters should have similar success. The highest densities in the region will be found in the northeastern portion and southern tier of counties in the region.

Quail – Quail are limited in the region and are predominantly taken opportunistically by pheasant hunters. The best hunting will be in the eastern counties in areas where adequate woody cover is present. This area is at the extreme northwestern edge of bobwhite range in Kansas and densities are relatively low compared to central and southern Kansas. While densities on the summer roadside survey increased this year, they remain the lowest regional densities 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 this area remains closed to prairie chicken hunting this year (see map for unit boundaries). Best prairie chicken hunting opportunities will be found in the northeastern portion of the region (within the Greater Prairie Chicken Unit) in native prairie and nearby CRP grasslands.

Smoky Hills/Northcentral

Pheasant – Pheasant hunters should expect good opportunities throughout most of the region. The Smoky Hills spring crow survey saw large increases, followed by large increases in the summer roadside counts. Spring precipitation created good nesting conditions again this year and the region maintained relatively high production. Regional hunter success rates were lower than the other regions last year, but should improve with increased densi-

ties. Roadside counts were high throughout the region, but the western half was the highest.

Quail – Quail hunting should be good to great throughout the region this year. The spring whistle survey increased by 40 percent this year. With good production conditions, the roadside survey also increased. The Smoky Hills had the highest regional roadside index for quail in 2017. Quail in northcentral Kansas can be spotty; however, this year should be more consistent across the region within appropriate habitat. Although the easternmost counties had lower counts, densities were relatively good across the region.

Greater Prairie Chicken – Prairie chicken hunting opportunities in the region will be good to great. This region includes some of the highest densities and access in the state for prairie chickens. Greater prairie chickens occur throughout the Smoky Hills where large areas of native rangeland are intermixed with CRP and cropland. Spring lek counts remained fairly stable and, with good production for both pheasant and quail, production should have been good for prairie chickens. The best hunting will be found in the central portion of the region but several other areas can hold high densities of birds. Lesser prairie chickens occur in a few counties in the southwestern portion of the region that are within the Southwest Prairie Chicken Unit closed to hunting this year.

Glaciated Plains/Northeast

Pheasant – Hunting prospects are poor with opportunities existing only in pockets of habitat, primarily in the northwestern portion of the region or areas managed for upland birds. Spring crow counts this year declined from 2016. Roadside surveys saw large decreases with pheasants being observed on just one route in 2017. Pheasant densities across the region are typically low, especially relative to other areas in central and western Kansas.

Quail – Quail hunters should expect fair to locally good opportunities this year. Bobwhites on the spring whistle count increased slightly, remaining above average. This included a few extraordinarily high counts for the region not observed in many years. Roadside counts indicated a slight decline, likely attributed to heavy summer rainfall events. While urbanization and large-scale succession in the region have deteriorated habitat and caused long-term population declines, carryover birds from 2016 should maintain some opportunity in the area. Opportunities are expected to be down from last year, but better than average. Roadside counts were highest in the northeastern portion of the region.

Greater Prairie Chicken – Very little prairie chicken range occurs in this region and opportunities are limited. Greatest opportunity exists 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 – Quail hunting opportunity will be poor to fair across the region. Though long-term trends have been declining, spring surveys have been steadily increasing over the last decade and remained stable this year. Roadside surveys were down in 2017 with production in the region being low, likely in response to heavy precipitation. Hunters should expect densities lower than last year, but still better than average. Areas where birds were found last year should offer some opportunities, with the best hunting found in western counties along the Flint Hills.

Greater Prairie Chicken – Greater prairie chickens occur in the central and northwestern portions of this region in large areas of native rangeland. Populations have consistently declined over the long-term. Fire suppression and loss of native grassland has gradually reduced the amount of suitable habitat in the region. The best hunting opportunities will be in large blocks of native rangeland along the edge of the Flint Hills region.

Flint Hills

Pheasant – This region is on the eastern edge of pheasant range in Kansas and offers limited opportunity. Pheasant densities have always been relatively low throughout the Flint Hills and the highest densities are typically found on the western edge of the region. The spring crowing counts decreased slightly this year, with the summer roadside survey indicating a slight decrease, as well. The best opportunities will be found in the northwest portion of the region.

Quail – Quail hunting in the Flint Hills should be comparable to last year. The region recorded a record index of whistling bobwhites this spring and the highest regional whistling index in 2017. While summer roadside counts were slightly decreased compared to 2016, hunting is expected to be good. Regional reports indicate good bird numbers, very good cover, and weather that likely promoted production. Additionally, carryover birds from high spring densities will help maintain opportunity this year. Quail densities will 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. The southern half of the region recorded the highest roadside indices this year.

Greater Prairie Chicken – The Flint Hills is the largest intact tall-grass prairie in North America and 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. Spring lek surveys were stable this year. Production in the core of the Flint Hills will be depressed again this year due to large scale annual burning practices. Hunting opportunities will likely be similar to last year throughout the region.

Southcentral Prairies

Pheasant – Pheasant hunters should expect a fair to good season in the area this year. The spring pheasant crow survey indicated a 27 percent increase from 2016. The summer roadside survey was relatively stable for the region. Pheasants will be readily found in

the traditional pheasant areas of the region. Based on roadside surveys, opportunities are expected to remain similar to slightly decreased from last year. The highest pheasant densities will be in the northwestern portion of the region.

Quail – Quail hunting should remain good throughout the region. The spring whistle survey was slightly increased, but was followed by a decline on the summer roadside survey. Despite this decline, the region maintained relatively good densities, given it had the highest regional density last year. The region had the second highest regional roadside index in 2017. Similar to the Flint Hills, reports indicate quail numbers are likely better than roadside surveys have indicated. The intermixing of quality cover provides more consistent opportunities in the Southcentral Prairies compared to other regions. The highest roadside counts were recorded in the northern and eastern portions, but hunting should be good throughout the region.

Prairie Chicken – This region is almost entirely occupied by lesser prairie chickens and areas included in their range are closed to prairie chicken hunting (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 within the remaining large tracts of rangeland in the northeastern portion of the region.

Southern High Plains/Southwest

Pheasant – Pheasant hunting will be fair to good in the region this year, but birds will not be as abundant as last year. The regional pheasant crow index increased again this year to near all-time highs. However, the roadside surveys showed significant declines, most likely attributed to the early spring snowfall's impact on nesting hens. Adult survival is not expected to have been impacted, and adult carryover should help offset some of the reduced production. The highest densities will be in the eastern half of the region where the snowfall wasn't as extreme.

Quail – Opportunities will remain good in the region, but hunters should expect lower densities than observed over the past few years. The quail population in this region is highly variable depending on weather. Whistle counts were only half of 2016 counts, following adult mortality from the snowstorm. Despite major losses, the spring surveys remained above the long-term average. Above-average precipitation created good conditions for production. Roadside surveys were down from last year, but not significantly. The highest densities will be found in the eastern portion of the region where snowfall was lighter and along riparian corridors or other areas where woody cover is available. Scaled quail are also found in this region but made up a smaller proportion of quail observations this year than in 2016.

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