

## Statewide Summary

### PHEASANT

Kansas reported the second highest pheasant harvest among states in 2017, and Kansas will still have one of the best pheasant populations in the country this fall. Pheasant hunting in Kansas should be fair to locally good this year. Pheasant densities had been slowly recovering from 2013 to 2016 with a few areas reaching relatively high densities. A late 2017 spring blizzard in western Kansas reduced nesting success and resulted in a decline in the 2018 pheasant crow survey. Winter precipitation was limited this year, resulting in short wheat and concern for nesting prospects. Heavy spring and summer showers greatly improved vegetative cover for nesting, but also limited nest success. Conditions shifted peak pheasant hatch later into June and July. While wheat harvest was delayed, which typically benefits pheasant production, the short wheat limited its usefulness for nesting. Roadside counts indicate a below-average pheasant population this year. The combination of heavy cover and a later peak hatch may have reduced the number of detectable birds on the counts, but generally survey conditions were ideal. The best areas will likely be in the northern half of the Kansas pheasant range with areas of high densities also found in central and far southwestern regions.

### QUAIL

Last fall's Kansas bobwhite quail harvest was the highest recorded in the country, finishing just above Texas, and while hunting isn't expected to be quite as good in 2018, Kansas will still have one of the best quail populations in the country. Precipitation patterns observed over the past five years altered vegetation, increasing both the quality and quantity of habitat, allowing for a modern quail boom. While total har-

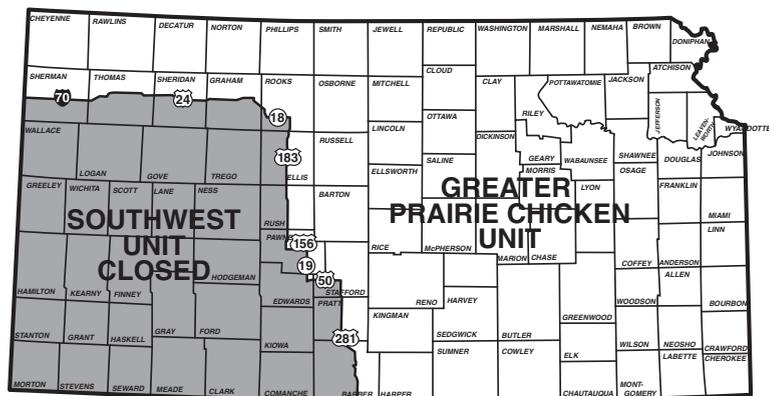
vest has remained well below average due to lower hunter participation, the average daily bag has remained at the best levels observed in 20 years. The bobwhite whistle survey in 2018 showed only a slight decline compared to the 2017's highest values ever recorded from this survey, which began in 1997. Dry weather in the east and wet weather in the west provided optimism for high production and another banner year. Early reports indicated lots of birds along roadsides and throughout wheat fields during harvest. However, observations on the statewide roadside survey were significantly down this year, with only the Osage Cuestas showing improvement. Densities in the eastern-most regions are not as high, but all regional indices remain near or above their respective long-term averages. The best opportunities will again be found in the central regions, extending east into the northern Flint Hills.

### GREATER 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. Hunting opportunities will be best in the Northern High Plains and Smoky Hills Regions this fall, where populations have been increasing or stable.

**All prairie chicken hunters are required to purchase a \$2.50 Prairie Chicken Permit in addition to their hunting license.** This permit allows hunter activity and harvest to be measured and will improve management activities and inform policy decisions.

### Greater Prairie Chicken Unit



The Southwest Unit is closed to all prairie chicken hunting.

## Forecast Factors

Two important factors impact upland game numbers during the fall hunting season: the number of breeding adults in the spring and the reproductive success of the breeding population. Reproductive success consists of the number of nests that successfully hatch and the number of chicks recruited into the fall population. Annual survival is relatively low for pheasants and quail, therefore, the fall population is more dependent on reproductive success than adult breeding population levels. While reproductive success is a major population regulator for prairie chicken, 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.

This year, Kansas was very dry between October and April, resulting in poor habitat conditions entering the nesting season. Heavy rains in May in the western half of the state greatly improved cover, while eastern regions remained dry. Dry conditions limited burning in the Flint Hills, retaining better-than-average nesting cover and may have improved nesting success across all eastern regions. While moisture in the west is usually a good thing, there can be too much of a good thing. Heavy rainfall continued in the west during the nesting season, with some areas receiving more than 12 inches above normal rainfall. Storms resulted in several localized hail and flooding events, which likely caused additional mortality within the impacted areas. Overall, extreme conditions appear to have reduced production this year, as indicated by lower roadside counts. The resulting vegetation may challenge hunters as there is excessive winter habitat this fall. However, this winter habitat should also guard against losses from severe winter weather.

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. 09/18

# 2018 Kansas Upland Bird Forecast



**YOUTH PHEASANT/QUAIL SEASON**  
Nov. 3-4, 2018

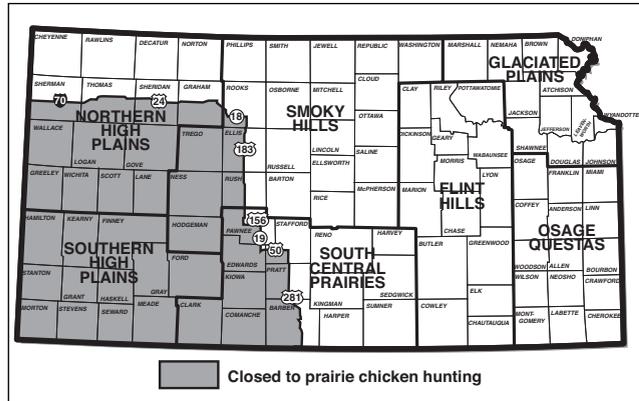
**PHEASANT/QUAIL SEASON**  
Nov. 10, 2018 - Jan. 31, 2019

**GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN SEASONS**  
Early: Sept. 15 - Oct. 15, 2018  
Regular: Nov. 17, 2018 - Jan. 31, 2019



Find the 2018 Kansas Hunting and Furharvesting Regulations Summary, the 2018 Hunting Atlas and other hunting information at [ksoutdoors.com](http://ksoutdoors.com)

# Regional Forecasts



## Northern High Plains/Northwest

**Pheasant** – Pheasant hunting opportunities should remain fair to good, but there will be fewer birds in the area than last year. The spring pheasant crow survey index was the highest regional index this year but remained below-average for the region. There was a significant decline in the regional pheasant index on the roadside survey this year compared to 2017. Production was assumed to be negatively impacted by heavy rainfall throughout the summer, which was confirmed by ongoing research in the region. The highest densities will be found in the northern half of the region, particularly the northeastern counties.

**Quail** – Quail are limited in this region and most are taken opportunistically by pheasant hunters. The best areas are in the eastern counties of the region; areas where adequate woody cover is present. This region is at the extreme northwestern edge of bobwhite range in Kansas and densities are relatively low compared to central and southern Kansas. Densities on the summer roadside survey decreased this year and remain the lowest in the state.

**Prairie Chicken** – Prairie chicken populations continue to expand in both numbers and range within the region. Lesser prairie-chickens occur in the southern and central portions of the region and remain closed to prairie chicken hunting this year (see map for unit boundaries). Within the area that is open, the best hunting opportunities will be found in the northeastern portion of the region in native prairies and nearby CRP grasslands.

## Smoky Hills/Northcentral

**Pheasant** – Pheasant hunters should expect fair to good opportunities throughout much of the region. The spring crow survey saw a slight decrease, followed by a decrease in the summer roadside counts. Despite this decrease, the Smoky Hills had the highest regional roadside density in the state. Regional harvest estimates were highest in the Smoky Hills last year but are expected to decrease with decreased densities. The northern half of the region contained the highest roadside counts; however, counties in the southwestern portion of the region along the border of the South-Central Prairies observed good counts as well.

**Quail** – Quail hunting should be fair to good throughout the region this year. The spring whistle survey showed a slight decrease this year. Significant decreases were observed on roadside surveys as well. Given there has been very high densities for the past 3 years, the region retained the highest roadside index for quail in 2018, despite the observed losses. While quail in north-central Kansas have seemed ubiquitous across the landscape the past few years, they have historically been spotty in the region. The Smoky Hills will likely offer above-average densities; however, with declines this year, quail will return to more historic patterns. Densities were best in the central portion, extending eastward toward the northern Flint Hills

**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. The best hunting will be found in the central portion of the region, but several other areas support huntable densities of birds in appropriate habitat. Lesser prairie-chickens occur only in portions of a few counties in the southwestern portion of the region and those areas are closed to hunting (see map for unit boundaries).

## Glaciated Plains/Northeast

**Pheasant** – Pheasant densities across the region are typically low, especially relative to other areas in central and western Kansas. Success will remain poor with hunting 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 2017. Roadside surveys showed increases; however, only two routes observed pheasants in 2018.

**Quail** – Quail hunters should expect fair to locally good opportunities this year. Bobwhites on the spring whistle count remained stable and above-average. This included a few routes that maintained extraordinarily high counts for the region. Roadside counts indicated a slight decline, although northeastern Kansas will have densities similar to the western regions this year where larger decreases were observed. While urbanization and succession have deteriorated habitat and caused long-term population declines, carry-over birds from 2017 should maintain above-average opportunity for this area. Opportunities are expected to be similar to last year and above average. Roadside counts were highest in the northwestern portion of the region.

**Prairie Chicken** – Very little prairie chicken range occurs in this region and opportunities are limited. Opportunities for encounters are highest 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 long-term trends have been declining, spring surveys have been steadily increasing over the last decade and remained stable this year. Roadside surveys indicated there was a slight increase in 2018, likely in response to dry weather in early summer. This was the only regional increase for quail observed this year. Hunters should expect densities similar to slightly above last year and remaining above average. Areas where birds were found last year should offer the best opportunities, with the best hunting in the northwestern counties in grasslands extending east off the Flint Hills.

**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 the primary pheasant range and offers limited opportunity. Highest pheasant densities are typically found on the western edge of the Flint Hills. While the spring crow counts remained stable this year, the summer roadside survey indicated a decrease. The best opportunities will be found in the northwest portion of the region bordering the Smoky Hills.

**Quail** – Quail hunting in the Flint Hills should be fair to good. The region had a slight decrease in the index of whistling bobwhites after record highs last year. While summer roadside counts were lower than in 2017, regional reports indicate good bird numbers, very good cover, and weather that likely promoted production – particularly in the northern half of the region where estimates largely improved. Additionally, carryover birds from high spring densities will help maintain opportunity. Quail densities in the core of the Flint Hills should have improved this year, where prolonged drought reduced large-scale annual burning, increasing available nesting habitat. The northern half of the region recorded the highest roadside indices this year.

**Prairie Chicken** – The Flint Hills is the largest intact tallgrass prairie in North America and has served as a core habitat for greater prairie chickens for many years. Since the early 1980s, inappropriate range burning frequencies, both too little and too much, have gradually degraded habitat quality, and prairie chicken numbers have declined. Production should improve in the core of the Flint Hills this year due to prolonged drought reducing large-scale burning and increasing available nesting cover. Hunting opportunities will likely be better than last year throughout the region.

## Southcentral Prairies

**Pheasant** – Pheasant hunters should expect a fair to good season this year. The spring crow survey indicated a decline from 2017. However, the summer roadside survey showed a slight increase from last year. Based on roadside surveys, opportunities are expected to remain similar to last year with highest pheasant densities found in the northern tier of counties along the border of the Smoky Hills region.

**Quail** – Quail hunting should remain fair to good throughout the region. The spring whistle survey showed a significant decrease, followed by a decline on the summer roadside survey. Despite this decline, the region maintained near average densities, with the second highest regional index on the roadside survey. Like the Flint Hills, reports indicate quail numbers may be better than roadside surveys have indicated. The intermixing of quality cover provides more consistent opportunities in the Southcentral Prairies compared to other regions. Roadside counts were highest in the northcentral portion of the region, although relatively consistent counts were observed throughout the region and quality opportunities should exist region-wide.

**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 remain fair to good, with bird numbers similar to last year. The pheasant crow index decreased this spring after heavy spring snowfall impacted nesting success in 2017. Roadside surveys showed slight declines in the region, after heavy rainfall throughout spring and summer likely decreased production. The highest densities will be in the western half of the region where the rainfall wasn't as extreme.

**Quail** – Opportunities will remain fair to good. The quail population in this region is highly variable depending on weather. Whistle counts were significantly higher, with populations recovering from losses from a 2017 late-spring blizzard. This increase returned the spring surveys to well above the long-term average and was the highest regional density for the year. Above-average precipitation created good habitat, but poorly timed rainfall events appear to have negatively impacted production. Roadside surveys were down from last year. The highest densities will be found along riparian corridors where adequate woody structure exists. Scaled quail are also found in this region but made up a smaller proportion of quail observations this year than in 2017.

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