

Statewide Summary

Pheasant

Pheasant hunting in Kansas should be fair to locally good this year. Heavy winter precipitation made hunting conditions tough in 2018 but provided ample soil moisture entering the 2019 nesting season. A few late winter storms raised some concern in western Kansas, but the spring crowing index remained the same as 2018, indicating there was no measurable impact on over-winter survival. Heavy rainfall continued throughout the spring and resulted in high levels of nest abandonment. However, nests that did hatch appear to have responded to the plentiful cover with relatively high chick survival, indicated by larger brood sizes. In wet years like 2019, the nesting season becomes longer, allowing for multiple re-nesting attempts. Overall, the large brood sizes, combined with production from re-nesting birds appear to have compensated for the losses from extreme spring weather. The counts through much of central Kansas decreased while numbers further west increased or remained similar to last year. Kansas continues to maintain one of the best pheasant populations in the country and the fall harvest should again be among the leading states. The highest densities this year will likely be in the High Plains regions of western Kansas.

Quail

Quail hunting in Kansas should be good in 2019. Kansas is still supporting above-average quail populations after a recent population boom. While total harvest has remained below average due to decreasing hunter participation, the average daily bag has remained at some of the highest levels observed in 20 years. The bobwhite whistle survey in spring 2019 saw a modest decline following a generally poor production season in 2018. However, this is relative to a 20-year high in 2017, so despite the decline, spring densities were still well above average. The 2019 roadside survey index was just slight-

ly higher than 2018, suggesting production compensated for any reductions previously recorded. However, regional quail densities have changed. Heavy precipitation and associated flooding across the eastern regions reduced productivity. While rainfall was also high across the western regions, a mid-summer dry period and improved habitat increased production. While densities in the eastern-most regions have decreased, all remaining regional indices remain at or above their respective long-term averages. Kansas maintains one of the premier quail populations in the country and harvest will again be among the highest this year. The best opportunities will be found in the central regions, extending east into the northern Flint Hills and west into the Southern High Plains.

Greater Prairie Chicken

Kansas is home to both greater and lesser prairie chickens. Both species require a landscape of predominately native grass and benefit from a few interspersed grain fields. Lesser prairie chickens are found in west-central and southwestern Kansas in native prairie and nearby stands of native grass established through the CRP. 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. Greater prairie chickens have expanded in numbers and range in the Northwestern portion of the state while declining in the eastern regions. Hunting opportunities will be best in the Northern High Plains and Smoky Hills regions this fall, where populations have either been increasing or stable, and public access is more abundant.

The Southwest Prairie Chicken Unit, where lesser prairie chickens are found, remains closed to hunting this year. Greater prairie chickens may be harvested during the early and regular prairie chicken seasons with a two-bird daily bag limit in the Greater Prairie Chicken Unit. **All prairie chicken hunters must purchase a \$2.50 Prairie Chicken Permit.**

Forecast Factors

Two important factors impact availability of upland birds during the fall hunting season: number of breeding adults in the spring and the reproductive success of the breeding population. Reproductive success consists of both the number of hatched nests and chick survival. For pheasant and quail, annual survival is relatively low; therefore, the fall population is more dependent on summer reproduction than spring adult numbers. For prairie chickens, reproductive success is still the major population regulator, but higher adult survival helps maintain hunting opportunities during poor conditions.

In this forecast, breeding population and reproductive success of pheasants, quail, and prairie chickens will be discussed. Breeding population data were gathered using 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 do not associate with roads like pheasants and quail.

Kansas has a dramatic rainfall gradient from more than 50 inches of average annual rainfall in the far east to less than 13 inches in the far west. The amount and timing of rainfall plays a major role in reproduction for upland birds. In the west, wet years typically improve the available cover and increase insect availability for chicks. In the east, dry years are typically more optimal, as heavy rains during spring and summer can reduce survival of nesting birds and young chicks. In 2019, Kansas had above-average precipitation throughout the winter and early spring across the state, resulting in excellent habitat conditions entering the nesting season. Heavy rains statewide in May negatively impacted initial pheasant nests and early nesting quail. Flooding associated with these storms displaced many birds and likely destroyed some nests, particularly in the eastern regions where flooding was most extreme and sustained by additional heavy rainfall events throughout summer. The resulting vegetation may challenge hunters as there is abundant and highly-distributed habitat for birds to utilize. Furthermore, rain delayed planting for all crops and a late harvest is expected. However, abundant habitat should increase winter survival in the event of severe winter storms.

Where to Hunt

Kansas has nearly 1.7 million acres open to public hunting (wildlife areas and WIHA combined). This is only a small portion of the more than 52 million acres of private land that also provides ample opportunity where permission can be obtained.

To view maps of all lands open to public hunting, download the *2019-2020 Kansas Fall & Spring Hunting Atlas* found at ksoutdoors.com/Hunting/Where-to-Hunt.

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. 09/19

2019 Kansas Upland Bird Forecast



Pheasant/Quail Seasons

Youth.....Nov. 2-3, 2019
Regular.....Nov. 9, 2019 – Jan. 31, 2020

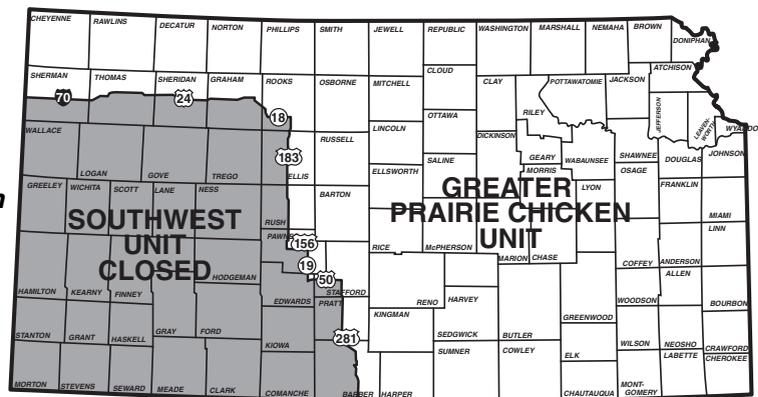
Greater Prairie Chicken Seasons

Early.....Sept. 15 – Oct. 15, 2019
Regular.....Nov. 16, 2019 – Jan. 31, 2020



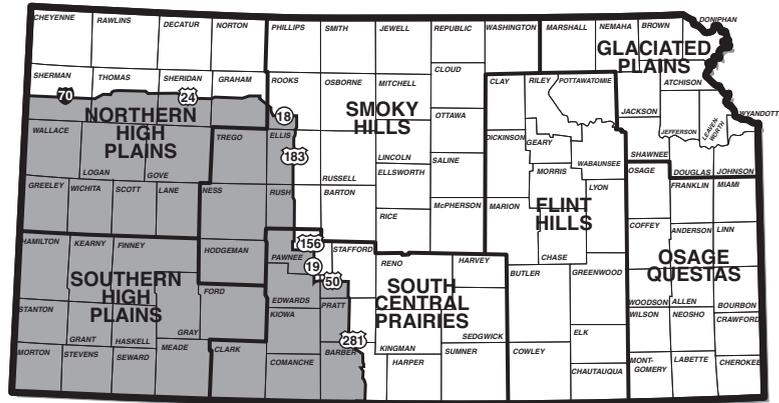
www.ksoutdoors.com

Greater Prairie Chicken Unit



The Southwest Unit is closed to all prairie chicken hunting.

Regional Forecasts



Northern High Plains (Northwest)

Pheasant – Pheasant hunting opportunities should be good, with slightly more birds in the region than last year. This region had the highest regional index for the summer brood survey and was the only region with a notable increase, following spring breeding densities similar to 2018. Production values were higher than 2018 due to increased nest and brood success. The highest densities will be found in the northern half of the region.

Quail – Quail are limited and typically harvested opportunistically by pheasant hunters. With recent population increases, quail have expanded into the eastern portion of this region, where adequate shrub cover is present. While densities remain relatively low compared to central and southwest Kansas, this expansion will provide additional opportunity for those who target appropriate habitat. Densities on the summer roadside survey increased but remain the lowest regional density in the state.

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

Smoky Hills (Northcentral)

Pheasant – Pheasant hunters should expect fair opportunities throughout much of the region with some localized areas that are good. The spring crow survey saw a slight decrease but remained above average for the region. This was followed by a decrease in the birds recorded on the summer brood survey. Regional harvest estimates were highest in the Smoky Hills last year but are expected to decline with reduced pheasant densities. The western portion of the region had the highest roadside densities this year.

Quail – Quail hunting should be good throughout the region this year. The spring whistle survey declined slightly this year. However, there was a significant increase observed on roadside surveys (46 percent) compared to 2018. After above-average densities over the past three years, the region retained the highest roadside index for quail in 2019. Regional harvest in 2018 was the highest in the state with good hunter success rates. While quail in northcentral Kansas have seemed widespread across the landscape the past few years, they have historically been spotty in the region. The Smoky Hills will offer above-average densities again; however, targeting traditional areas and habitats will remain the best strategy for success. Densities were good across most of the region.

Prairie Chicken – Prairie chicken hunting opportunities in the region should remain good. While production was likely low, spring counts were relatively good. 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 in a few counties in the southwestern portion of the region within the closed zone (see map for unit boundaries).

Glaciated Plains (Northeast)

Pheasant – Opportunities will remain poor with pheasants occurring only in pockets of habitat, primarily in the northwestern portion of the region or areas managed for upland birds. Spring crow counts declined from 2018 and remain well below average. Roadside surveys showed an increase in total pheasant observations; however, only one route observed pheasants in 2019. Pheasant densities across the region are typically low, especially relative to other areas in central and western Kansas.

Quail – Quail hunters should expect fair hunting where opportunities exist this year. Bobwhite observations declined on the spring whistle count, as well as on the summer brood survey. Since the region had been above the long-term average the past few years, densities should be near normal. While extensive flooding likely limited production, surviving adult birds from 2018 should maintain opportunities where birds were found last year. 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 opportunities exist. Pheasants are occasionally found in the northwestern portion of the region at very low densities.

Quail – Opportunities will be poor to locally fair this year. While spring surveys had increased for several years, two consecutive years of poor production have resulted in population declines. Roadside surveys were substantially lower in the region this year and were the lowest of any region in the primary quail range. This is likely in response to heavy precipitation and associated flooding throughout the summer. Hunters should expect densities below last year in most places. The best hunting should be in the northwestern counties in grasslands extending east off of the Flint Hills.

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

Flint Hills

Pheasant – This region is on the eastern edge of the primary pheasant range in Kansas and offers limited opportunities. Pheasant densities have always been relatively low throughout the Flint Hills, with the highest densities found on the western edge of the region. The spring crow counts declined this year, while the summer roadside survey indicated a slight increase (though with few total observations). The best opportunities will be in the northwest portion of the region along the Smoky Hills.

Quail – Quail hunting in the Flint Hills should be good this year. The region had a slight decrease in the index of whistling bobwhites but remained above average. Summer roadside counts were similar to 2018. Quail production was likely impeded in the core of the Flint Hills by a wet spring and extensive prescribed burning of cattle pastures. Hunters should expect similar densities as last year. The northern half of the region recorded the highest roadside indices this year.

Prairie Chicken – The Flint Hills is the largest in-tact tallgrass prairie in North America and has been a core habitat for greater prairie chickens for many years. Management changes resulting in both areas of too little and too much prescribed fire have gradually degraded habitat quality, and prairie chicken numbers have declined as a result. The wet spring allowed for extensive burning throughout the region this spring and likely resulted in low levels of production. Hunting opportunities will likely be reduced from last year throughout the region.

South Central Prairies

Pheasant – Pheasant hunters should expect a fair season this year. The spring crow survey remained unchanged from 2018 and near long-term averages. While total observations in the summer roadside survey declined, the pattern was inconsistent, with some areas showing notable improvement while others declined. The highest pheasant densities will be in the western half of the region.

Quail – Quail hunting should remain good throughout much of the region. Both the spring whistle survey and summer brood survey were similar to 2018. As such, the region maintained near-average densities and was the second highest regional index on the roadside survey this year. Production appeared to be greatly improved with a much higher chick-to-adult ratio. The intermixing of quality cover types provides more consistent opportunities in the South Central Prairies compared to other regions. The roadside counts were highest in the northwestern portion of the region, although relatively good counts were observed throughout much of 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 and 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 good, with bird numbers similar to last year. Surprisingly, the pheasant crow index increased this spring after lower estimated production in 2018. Roadside brood surveys remained the same, with all production indices increasing slightly, likely due to above-average precipitation for the region. While the 2018 harvest was lower than other regions, success rates for hunters in this region were higher. The highest pheasant densities will be in the eastern half of the region with other areas of high densities scattered throughout.

Quail – Opportunities will remain good. The quail population in the region is highly variable and dependent on weather. Whistle counts declined significantly after a mid-winter blizzard impacted much of the region. Despite this decline in adult quail, spring surveys remained above the long-term average and were the highest regional density in the state. Above-average precipitation created quality habitat, resulting in high levels of production, which off-set low adult overwinter survival. The highest densities will be found along riparian corridors where adequate woody structure exists. This association with riparian corridors also makes surveying the region for an accurate density of quail challenging, and opportunities may be better than roadside surveys suggest. Scaled quail, though found in this region, were a smaller proportion of quail observations this year than in 2018.

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