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 overwinter 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 nesting attempts. Overall, the large brood sizes, combined with production from remnant 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 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 chicken. Both species require a landscape of predominately native grass and benefit from a few interspersed grain fields. Lesser prairie chickens are found across the 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 pheasant hunters must purchase a $2.50 Prairie Chicken Permit.

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs described herein is available to all individuals without regard to race, gender, age, national origin, religion, color, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation. Complaints of discrimination should be sent to Office of the Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, 1202 S Kansas Ave., Topeka, KS 66612-1327. 913-556-8161.

Greater Prairie Chicken Seasons

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
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<tr>
<td>Regular.........</td>
<td>Nov. 16, 2019 – Jan. 31, 2020</td>
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<td>Nov. 9, 2019 – Jan. 31, 2020</td>
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<td>Regular.........</td>
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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 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 provide 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.
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. A positive factor is that spring covey counts were higher than last year. While there may be a decrease in the western portion of the region, this will provide additional opportunity for those that target greater prairie chickens. Densities on the summer roadside survey increased but remain the lowest regional density in the state.

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 other areas in central and western Kansas, quail will provide additional opportunity for those that target pheasant. Densities on the summer roadside survey increased but remain the lowest regional density in the state.

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 range-land 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. In the central area, pheasant densities were nearly double the average. Roadside surveys showed an increase in total pheasant observaions; however, pheasant hunters reported a decrease 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, some favorable areas may 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 pre-copulation and associated flooding throughout the summer. Hunters should expect densities below last year in most places. The best hunting will be found in the northwestern counties in grasslands extending east 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. Population densities 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 found in the northwestern 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 improved in the core of the Flint Hills by a wet spring and extensive pre-burned 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 reduced fire and prescribed burning has helped maintain habitat, and pheasant hunters can afford dinner safely with 2018 should maintain opportunities where birds were found last year. Roadside counts were highest in the northwestern portion of the region.

South Central Prairies

Pheasant – Pheasant hunters should expect a fair season this year. The spring crop survey remained unchanged from 2018 and near long-term averages. While observations in the summer roadside survey declined, the pattern was inconsistent, with some areas showing notable improvement while others declined. The highest pheas- ant 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. In fact, roadside counts were high- est 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. The spring pheasant count index increased this spring after lower estimated production in 2018. Roadside brood surveys showed production indices increasing slightly, likely due to above-average precipitation for the region. While the 2018 harvest was lower than other regions, the average population in the region is much 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 sur-veys 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 offset 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 opportu-nities may be better than roadside surveys suggest. Scaled quail, while still plentiful in this region, were of lesser density and 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.