



Nebraska 2011 Upland Game Hunting Outlook

The following forecast is based on spring and summer upland-game population surveys, including the April and July Rural Mail Carrier Surveys, and the Northern Bobwhite Whistle Count Survey. In addition, district biologists provided input on conditions on-the-ground that were used to refine the recommendations based on survey results. Staff input included regional weather events that could have impacted populations and general range conditions. The descriptions below reflect the best available information regarding the relative abundances of small and upland game species among the regions of Nebraska, but cannot be used to predict hunting conditions or local population densities at any single location within a region.

RING-NECKED PHEASANTS

Nebraska is still among the top 5 states for pheasant hunting in the Midwest. Milder winter conditions across the state resulted in better over-winter survival; however, wet spring conditions and localized flooding of low-lying areas (particularly in the Panhandle and Sandhills) likely impacted nesting and habitat availability. The Statewide July Rural Mail Carrier Survey index was down, and regional indices were down everywhere except the Panhandle, where abundance was similar to 2010, and was at the 5 and 10-year averages (see Pheasant Survey Unit map on reverse). Despite declines, the best hunting should once again be in the Southwest, where the abundance index was at the 5-year regional average and above the 10-year regional average. The Southwest Focus on Pheasants Focus Area is located in Hitchcock, Hayes, and Red Willow Counties, and will provide excellent opportunities. Continued loss of CRP and conversion to cropland in the Northeast and Southeast has severely reduced available habitat for pheasants. In the Northeast, much of the available pheasant habitat is inaccessible to hunters due to hunting leases and other access restrictions. As a result, areas in the Northeast that were formerly productive hunting areas may no longer be so. Hunters are advised to scout areas prior to the start of the hunting season.

NORTHERN BOBWHITE

Bobwhite populations have begun to rebound from the losses caused by the winter of 2009-2010. Indices from both the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey and the Bobwhite Whistle Count Survey indicated that abundance had increased in most regions, except for the North Central and East Central regions (see Bobwhite Unit map on reverse). Hunting will likely be best this year in the Republican and Southeast regions. Removal of woody cover from fencerows, shelterbelts, and field corners for cropland and center-pivot development, coupled with loss of CRP in the Northeast has reduced the available habitat in this region.

PRAIRIE GROUSE (SHARP-TAILED GROUSE & GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN)

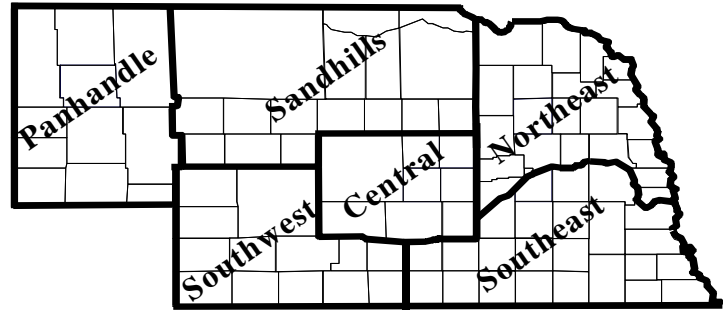
Prairie grouse abundance was generally lower in most regions based on the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey. The Sandhills remains the core of the prairie grouse range in Nebraska (see Pheasant Survey Unit map on reverse) and will offer the best opportunities west of Highway 81. The Central region will also offer good opportunities for grouse hunting. However, the cool, wet spring weather resulted in some flooding in the Sandhills, reducing nesting habitat. District staff reported fewer brood observations than in past years, possibly as a result of the flooding. Loss of grassland and CRP in the Southeast has reduced available habitat for grouse, which has likely impacted grouse abundance, but good numbers persist in Pawnee County. Staff observations in south-central Nebraska also indicate good numbers of grouse, particularly in Phelps, Harlan, and Kearney Counties.

COTTONTAILS

Cottontail abundance was lower statewide this year, but reports of locally high cottontail abundance have been reported by district staff. Regionally, the best cottontail opportunities will likely be in the Central and Southwest regions (see Pheasant Survey Unit map on reverse). In the Southeast, good numbers of cottontails can be found in Lancaster, Saunders, and Seward Counties.

◆ *See back of sheet for regional survey results* ◆

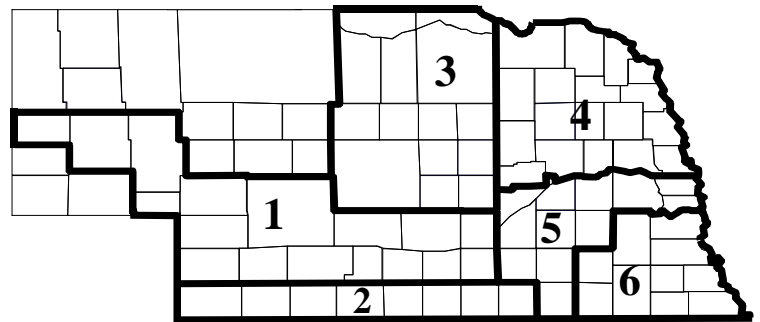
Pheasant Survey Units:



Region	% Change from 2010*		OVERALL Abundance Rank (1 = Best)	Top Counties (Based on Rural Mail Carrier Survey and staff observations)
	Rural Mail Carrier Survey			
Central	-21		4	Custer, Sherman
Northeast	-37		5	Antelope, Knox, Pierce
Panhandle	+1		2	Sheridan, Dawes, Box Butte, Garden
Sandhills	-22		3	Boyd, Wheeler, Holt
Southeast	-26		6	Kearney, Franklin, Lancaster, Saunders, Butler
Southwest	-24		1	Phelps, Harlan, Hitchcock, Red Willow, Hayes
Statewide	-27			

Bobwhite Units:

1. West Platte
2. Republican
3. North Central
4. Northeast
5. East Central
6. Southeast



Region	% CHANGE FROM 2010*		OVERALL Abundance Rank (1 = Best)	Top Counties (Based on Rural Mail Carrier Survey and staff observations)
	Bobwhite Whistle Count	Rural Mail Carrier Survey		
West Platte	+10	+21	3	Hayes, Hall, Frontier
Republican	+128	+29	1	Red Willow, Hitchcock, Furnas, Harlan
North Central	-21	-42	4	Custer, Howard
Northeast	+17	+21	6	Antelope, Knox, Pierce, Holt
East Central	-8	-39	5	Thayer, Fillmore, Saunders
Southeast	+12	+8	2	So. Lancaster, Jefferson, Johnson, Pawnee
Statewide	+21	-11		

* For low-ranked regions, large percent changes in indices might not translate into noticeable changes in hunting conditions.