



2016 Upland Game Hunting Outlook

The following forecast is based on spring and summer upland-game population surveys, including the July Rural Mail Carrier Surveys, and the Northern Bobwhite Whistle Count Survey. In addition, biologists from several districts provided input on regional weather events that could have impacted populations and general habitat 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. Public land and lands open to public hunting through the Open Fields and Waters program can be found in the *Public Access Atlas*, available online at <https://maps.outdoornebraska.gov/PublicAccessAtlas/>.

RING-NECKED PHEASANTS

Winter weather was generally mild, with a few regionally significant snow events interspersed with periods of above-average temperatures. Spring rainfall also appeared timely across most of the state producing abundant nesting and brood-rearing cover; however, later spring rains in some parts of the state might have affected nesting early on. Survey results from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey (see reverse) show pheasant abundance in 2016 was higher than the 5-year average in most regions of the state, indicating conditions better than experienced in recent years. Further, the survey results indicate that pheasant abundance was higher compared to 2015 in the Central and Sandhill regions. Although pheasant abundance was lower elsewhere compared to 2015, the decreases were not statistically significant, indicating that pheasant abundance in the fall will likely be similar to slightly lower than during the 2015 season, which saw an increase in harvest of 26% compared to the previous year. The Southwest and Panhandle regions will again offer the best hunting opportunities for the 2016 season. However, survey results only provide a broad-scale assessment of species abundance. At local scales, pheasant abundance might be higher or lower than region-wide estimates suggest for a given region. Pre-hunt scouting is recommended.

NORTHERN BOBWHITE

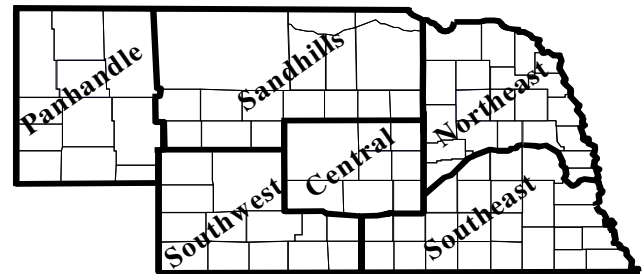
Bobwhite abundance continues to be high across the species' range in Nebraska. Mild winter conditions with frequent warm spells and few severe snow events combined with timely spring participation and relatively dry conditions during peak hatch have resulted in high bobwhite abundance in most regions of their range. Whistle Count Survey results (see reverse) indicate calling male bobwhites increased in the East Central, Republican, Southeast, and West Platte regions compared to 2015. As with pheasants, results from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey (see reverse) indicated that bobwhite abundance in 2016 was higher than the 5-year mean in the West Platte region. However, these results also showed lower abundance in most regions compared to 2015, but these decreases were not statistically significant. Taken together, the results of Whistle Count and July Rural Mail Carrier surveys indicate that bobwhite abundance in the fall should be as good or better than during the 2015 season, which was 73% greater than the year before. The Southeast, Republican, and East Central regions should provide the best opportunities for the 2016 season. Again, survey results provide a broad-scale assessment of the relative abundance of bobwhites. At local scales within regions, bobwhite abundance might be either higher or lower than regional estimates suggest for a particular region. Scouting before heading afield is encouraged.

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

Prairie grouse also seem to have benefited from the mild winter conditions, particularly in the Sandhills. Results from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey (not shown) indicate that grouse abundance were higher in the Sandhills and Northeast regions, but were down elsewhere. The number of males counted on leks in the spring was higher in the Sandhills for both sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie-chicken compared to 2015, but was lower in the Southeast (East Zone; prairie chicken only). The Sandhills will offer the best opportunities for the 2016 season.

◆ See back of sheet for regional survey results ◆

Pheasant Survey Units:

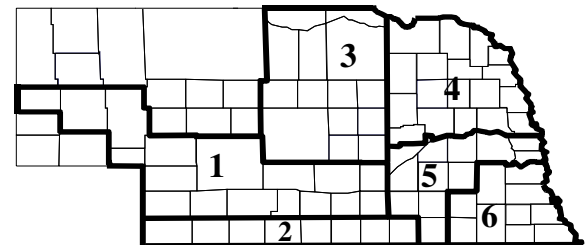


Region	% Change from*:		OVERALL Abundance Rank (1 = Best)	Top Counties (Based on July Rural Mail Carrier Survey)
	2015 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey	2011-2015 Average		
Central	+15	+14	4	Sherman, Dawson, Greeley, Hall, Custer
Northeast	-12	+1	5	Wayne, Dixon, Madison, Cuming, Burt
Panhandle	-37	-2	2	Sheridan, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Banner, Garden
Sandhills	+62	+43	3	Cherry, Holt, McPherson, Brown
Southeast	-36	-7	6	Clay, Otoe, Saunders, Nemaha, Lancaster
Southwest	-4	+4	1	Chase, Red Willow, Hitchcock, Hayes, Perkins
Statewide	-15	+4		

Bobwhite Units:

Units:

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



Region	% CHANGE FROM*			OVERALL Abundance Rank (1 = Best)	Top Counties (Based on July Rural Mail Carrier Survey)
	2015 Whistle Count	2015 Rural Mail Carrier Survey	2011-2015 Average RMCS		
West Platte	+26	-21	-2	5	Gosper, Perkins, Adams, Kearney, Hayes
Republican	+52	+16	+93	2	Furnas, Red Willow, Franklin, Nuckolls,
North Central	-16	+21	+92	4	Sherman, Custer, Greeley, Holt
Northeast	-12	-11	+23	6	Boone, Cuming, Antelope, Pierce
East Central	+35	-11	+111	3	Hamilton, Seward, Thayer, Clay, Merrick
Southeast	+3	-15	+60	1	Otoe, Johnson, Jefferson, Gage, Pawnee
Statewide	+7	-12	+59		

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