



2017 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

Statewide, pheasant abundance appears similar to last year based on July Rural Mail Carrier results (see reverse). However, some regional declines were observed. Overall abundance in the Southwest remains high compared to some regions of the state, and the best opportunities should be found in the Panhandle and Southwest regions this year. Mild winter and early spring weather typically support good production for pheasants where suitable habitat is available. In the Northeast, nesting conditions were good due to early spring rains, and staff observations of pheasant broods indicate a good hatch in some areas. In the Southeast, weather conditions have led to quality habitat where available, but observations of pheasants are similar to slightly lower than last year. Early moisture resulted in abundant, high quality habitat in the Northwest, but abnormally dry to moderate drought conditions set in over the summer. Staff observations and survey results in the Northwest indicate good pheasant numbers in the Panhandle. A spring snow storm struck portions of southwest and southcentral Nebraska while hens were nesting, likely resulting in abandonment of some initiated nests. Renesting attempts are likely, but typically have fewer eggs, potentially resulting in lower overall production in storm-affected areas. Survey results provide only a broad-scale assessment of abundance. At local scales, pheasant abundance might be higher or lower than region-wide estimates suggest for a given region. Pre-hunt scouting is encouraged.

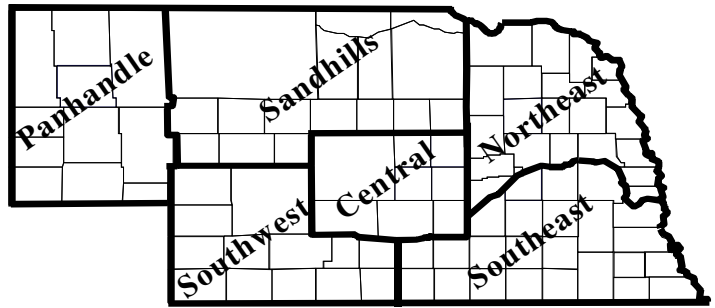
NORTHERN BOBWHITE

Bobwhite abundance again increased statewide and in most regions of the state compared to 2016, based on the July Rural Mail Carrier and Whistle Count Surveys (see reverse). The Southeast, East Central, and Republican bobwhite units should provide the best opportunities this fall. Mild winter conditions and timely spring rain benefited over-winter survival and nesting habitat conditions. Further, the late snow storm that hit parts of the southwest and southcentral regions occurred before the peak in bobwhite nesting, minimizing the impact on production. Whistle counts were higher than in 2016 and the 5-year average in all bobwhite regions except the Republican region (see reverse). The July Rural Mail Carrier Survey indicated higher bobwhite abundance in all regions except the Northeast and Southeast, but abundance was higher than the long-term averages in all regions except the Northeast (see reverse). In the Southeast, good numbers of large bobwhite broods have been observed, indicating good production. Fall abundance should be as good as or better than in 2016. However, survey results provide only a broad-scale assessment of relative abundance and at local scales, within regions, bobwhite abundance might be either higher or lower than regional estimates suggest. Scouting before heading afield is encouraged.

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

Results from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey indicate that prairie grouse numbers have declined throughout much of the core range compared to 2016. Survey results indicate relative abundance will be highest in the Sandhills, Central, and Panhandle regions, but with indices down in those regions, opportunities in other regions of the state are worth exploring. Although early weather conditions were promising, abnormally dry to moderate drought conditions dominated the summer adversely affecting grouse production in the Central and Sandhills regions. Outside the core range, grouse numbers increased or remained stable in the Northeast, Southeast and Southwest regions compared to 2016 and the 5-year mean.

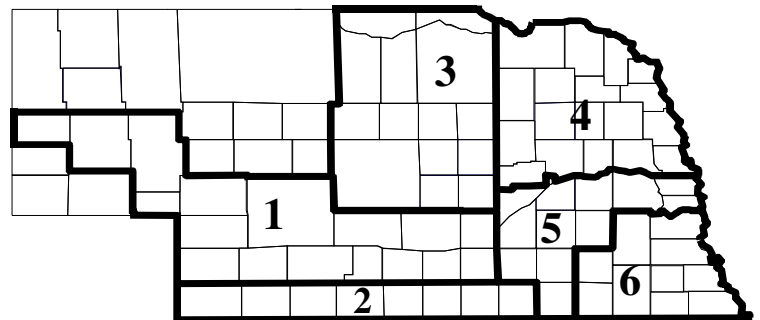
Pheasant Survey Units:



Region	% Change from*:		OVERALL Abundance Rank (1 = Best)	Top Counties (Based on July Rural Mail Carrier Survey)
	2016 July Rural Mail Carrier Survey	2012-2016 Average		
Central	-27	-9	4	Dawson, Greeley, Custer
Northeast	-6	-3	3	Wayne, Burt, Antelope, Dixon
Panhandle	195	189	1	Morrill, Cheyenne, Box Butte, Garden
Sandhills	-54	-32	5	Cherry, Holt, Boyd
Southeast	-11	-13	6	Jefferson, Gage, Cass, Thayer, Saline
Southwest	-11	0	2	Hayes, Harlan, Red Willow, Keith, Furnas
Statewide	-5	4		

Bobwhite Survey 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)
	2016 Bobwhite Whistle Count	2016 Rural Mail Carrier Survey	2012-2016 Average RMCS		
West Platte	26	82	102	4	Hayes, Dawson, Buffalo, Frontier
Republican	-15	59	193	2	Red Willow, Nuckolls, Franklin, Webster
North Central	33	7	68	5	Sherman, Howard, Valley, Greeley
Northeast	45	-41	-28	6	Dodge, Antelope, Boone, Wayne
East Central	9	61	164	3	Clay, Thayer, Hamilton, Seward
Southeast	17	-15	15	1	Cass, Saline, Gage, Lancaster, Nemaha
Statewide	14	29	81		

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