



2015 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 was used to refine the recommendations based on survey results. Staff input included regional weather events that could have impacted populations, general habitat conditions, and impressions of relative abundance. 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

Mild winter condition and timely spring rainfall have resulted in increases in pheasant abundance statewide. Spring rainfall also resulted in abundant cover, with staff reporting excellent habitat conditions across the state. Rural mail carrier survey results (see reverse) indicated that pheasant abundance was higher in all regions compared to 2014. Based on these survey results, the Southwest and Panhandle will offer the best opportunities this year, but good opportunities should be available statewide. With the lush vegetation comes an abundance of insects for chicks to consume. Reports from several regions indicate plentiful grasshoppers this year. Staff report seeing numerous broods of good size in the Southwest, and where good habitat exists in the Northeast. Localized hail storms in western Keith and southwestern Frontier Counties in the Southwest may have impacted abundance in those areas, and CRP loss continues in the Northeast, affecting overall abundance and access. Adverse weather in the Panhandle may have impacted early season production there, with fewer broods consisting of younger birds being observed there. Reports from the Southeast similarly report fewer broods of younger birds, likely resulting from early nest loss from the exceptional rainfall events in the region in May.

NORTHERN BOBWHITE

Bobwhite abundance continued its ascent from lows resulting from the drought of 2012-2013 and the severe winter of 2009-2010. Whistle count and Rural Mail Carrier surveys indicated increases in bobwhite abundance compared to 2014 across almost all of the range in the state (see reverse). As noted for pheasants, habitat conditions were excellent for production and brood-rearing across the state. Staff reported seeing and hearing more adult birds range-wide, and also report seeing numerous broods of various ages. In many cases, these reports indicate that abundance and/or production are higher than observed over the past several years. The Southeast and the southern portion of the North-Central regions should offer the best opportunities this year, but as with pheasants, there will be good opportunities range-wide.

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

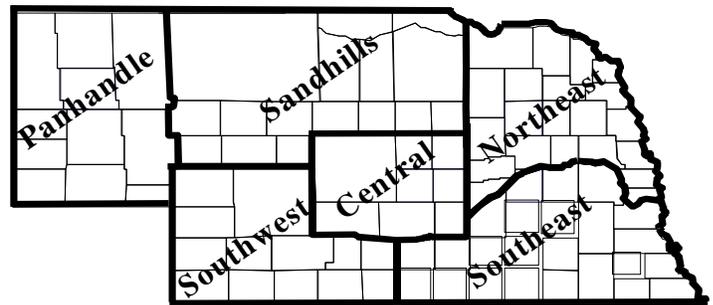
As for the other species, habitat conditions for prairie grouse were excellent this year, particularly in the Sandhills. Accordingly, results from the Rural Mail Carrier Survey indicated increases in most regions compared to 2014. Abundance indices were highest in the Central and Sandhills regions. Further, in the Sandhills, staff reported seeing an increase in the number of broods compared to recent years. In the Southeast (East Grouse Zone), although some survey data indicated an increase, staff report fewer observations, likely due to early rains and continued loss of CRP habitat.

COTTONTAILS

Both staff reports and Rural Mail Carrier Survey results indicate that cottontail abundance has increased significantly across the state, and particularly in the Southeast and Central regions. Staff also report observing multitudes of young rabbits.

◆ See back of sheet for regional survey results ◆

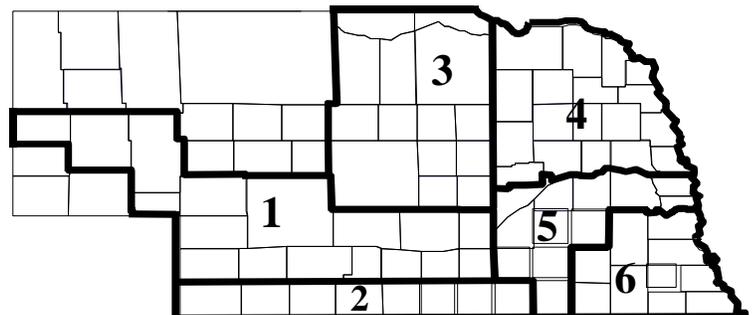
Pheasant Survey Units:



Region	% Change from 2014* July Rural Mail Carrier Survey	OVERALL Abundance Rank (1 = Best)	Top Counties (Based on Rural Mail Carrier Survey and staff observations)
Central	+52	5	Greeley, Sherman, Dawson, Custer
Northeast	+23	3	Madison, Cuming, Burt, Dixon
Panhandle	+132	2	Sheridan, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Banner
Sandhills	+17	6	Cherry, Blaine, Brown
Southeast	+64	4	Thayer, Pawnee, Clay, Richardson
Southwest	+83	1	Hitchcock, Perkins, Furnas, Hayes, Frontier
Statewide	+55		

Bobwhite Survey Units:

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



Region	% CHANGE FROM 2014*		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	+1	+33	5	Dawson, Gosper, Buffalo, Adams, Hall
Republican	+66	+309	3	Nuckolls, Webster, Furnas, Red Willow
North Central	+17	+91	2	Sherman, Custer, Howard, Greeley
Northeast	+41	+36	6	Boone, Pierce, Madison, Antelope
East Central	-13	+136	4	Clay, Thayer, Merrick, Seward
Southeast	+27	+46	1	Cass, Gage, Nemaha, Saline, Jefferson
Statewide	+21	+84		

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