

Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Project №: W-15-R-81**Title of Job: 2025 April Rural Mail Carrier Survey**

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The 2025 April Rural Mail Carrier Survey was conducted 7-10 April 2025. We received 385 cards by 10 June 2025, of which 339 cards contained complete information necessary for processing. The results below (Tables 1–2) are based on the complete cards. Rural Carriers made observations while traveling 142,047 miles of rural roads in 88 of Nebraska's 93 counties.

Caveats. The April survey provides a snapshot of wildlife populations entering the breeding season and might not reflect conditions experienced by hunters the subsequent fall. Interpretations of percent change from previous year's indices and longer-term means are only meaningful in relation to the indices themselves. That is, when an index value is low, insignificant changes in the index from one year to the next translates into large percent changes but result in no observable difference in abundance within a region. For example, an increase in a species index from 0.01 to 0.02 animals observed per 100 miles is a 100% increase but would not likely be noticeable to hunters afield. Further, survey methodology does not allow for the estimation of population size or density, but rather only for trends in relative abundance through time. At a statewide scale, these indices are correlated with harvest and are, therefore, useful for forecasting.

Interpretations. Statewide indices for all species except Bobwhites were similar to the 2024 survey. Regionally, indices were mixed compared to 2024. All regional indices for pheasants were higher compared to 2024. Cottontail regional indices were higher in the Northeast, Panhandle, and Southeast, similar to 2024 in the Central and Southwest regions, but lower in the Sandhills. Turkey regional indices were higher in the Northeast, Panhandle, Sandhills, and Southwest, similar to 2024 in the Central region, but lower in the Southeast. Bobwhite indices were higher in the East Central, Republican, Southeast, and West Platte, but lower in the North Central and Northeast regions.

Take Home Message. The results of this survey seem to indicate that game abundance should be in a good position going into the breeding season, but much will depend on the weather conditions during the breeding season and summer. Results from summer surveys, such as the bobwhite whistle counts and July RMCS will provide some insight into how the breeding season is going.

TABLE 1. Raw counts of pheasants, prairie grouse, wild turkey, cottontails, and jackrabbits from the 2025 April Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Fig. 1).

Region	Carriers	Miles	Pheasants	Grouse	Turkey	Cottontail	Jackrabbit
Central	45	19,661	189	31	893	105	3
Northeast	82	35,236	428	25	600	204	20
Panhandle	36	13,341	279	94	711	93	7
Sandhills	34	13,718	64	174	706	27	2
Southeast	93	40,094	81	42	471	200	18
Southwest	49	19,997	305	158	1,444	125	2
Statewide	339	142,047	1,346	524	4,825	754	52

FIGURE 1. Pheasant Management Regions.

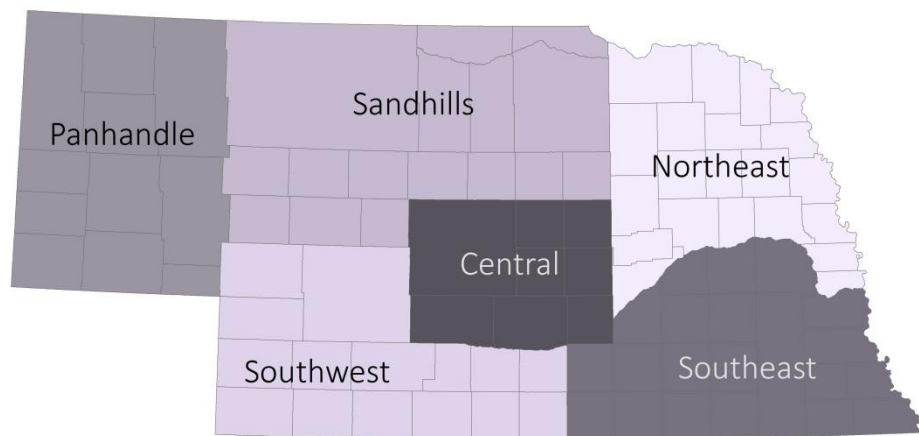
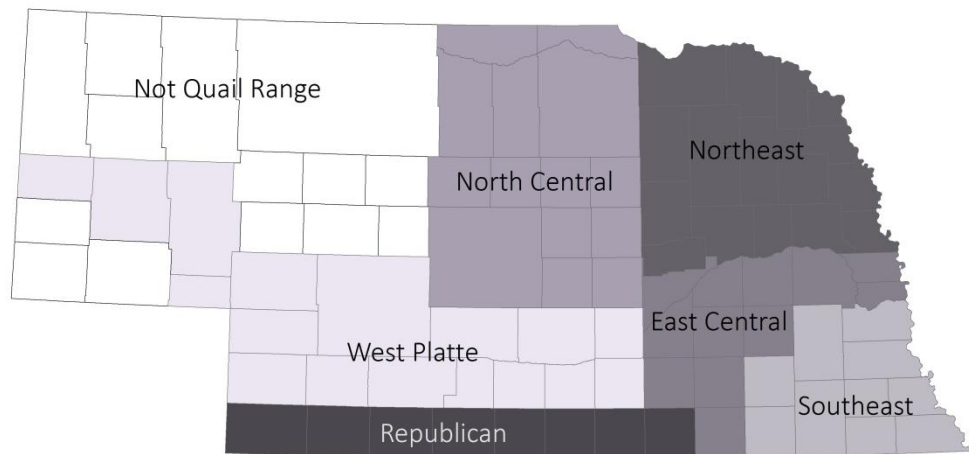


TABLE 2. Raw bobwhite counts from the 2025 April Rural Mail Carrier Survey by bobwhite management zones (Fig. 2).

Zone	Carriers	Miles	Bobwhites
East Central	56	23,043	19
North Central	40	18,326	32
Northeast	73	32,398	10
Republican	22	9,486	21
Southeast	36	15,061	27
West Platte	74	30,088	28
Not Quail Range	38	13,645	12
Statewide	339	142,067	149

FIGURE 2. Bobwhite Management Zones.

Results. Statewide indices were higher for all species except for Bobwhites (Tables 3-6, Figs. 3-6). Regional indices were generally mixed for all species compared to 2024. A total of 81 rural carrier cards were returned with no observations on them (23.6%) which is higher than in 2024. Table 7 shows how many cards contained zero observations by species.

TABLE 3. Pheasant indices from the 2025 April Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Fig. 1). Carrier means are weighted by miles traveled per carrier.

Region	Mean Pheasants per 100 miles & 90% Confidence Limits	Percent Difference from:			
		2024	Mean 2020-2024	Mean 2015-2024	Mean 2005-2024
Central	0.96 (0.00-2.37)	65	157	114	44
Northeast	1.21 (0.00-4.38)	167	169	150	51
Panhandle	2.09 (0.00-5.72)	76	50	4	0
Sandhills	0.46 (0.00-4.07)	57	-34	-51	-64
Southeast	0.20 (0.00-3.33)	17	-1	-31	-63
Southwest	1.52 (0.00-4.92)	72	18	-9	-31
Statewide	0.94 (0.42-1.47)	83	56	20	-10

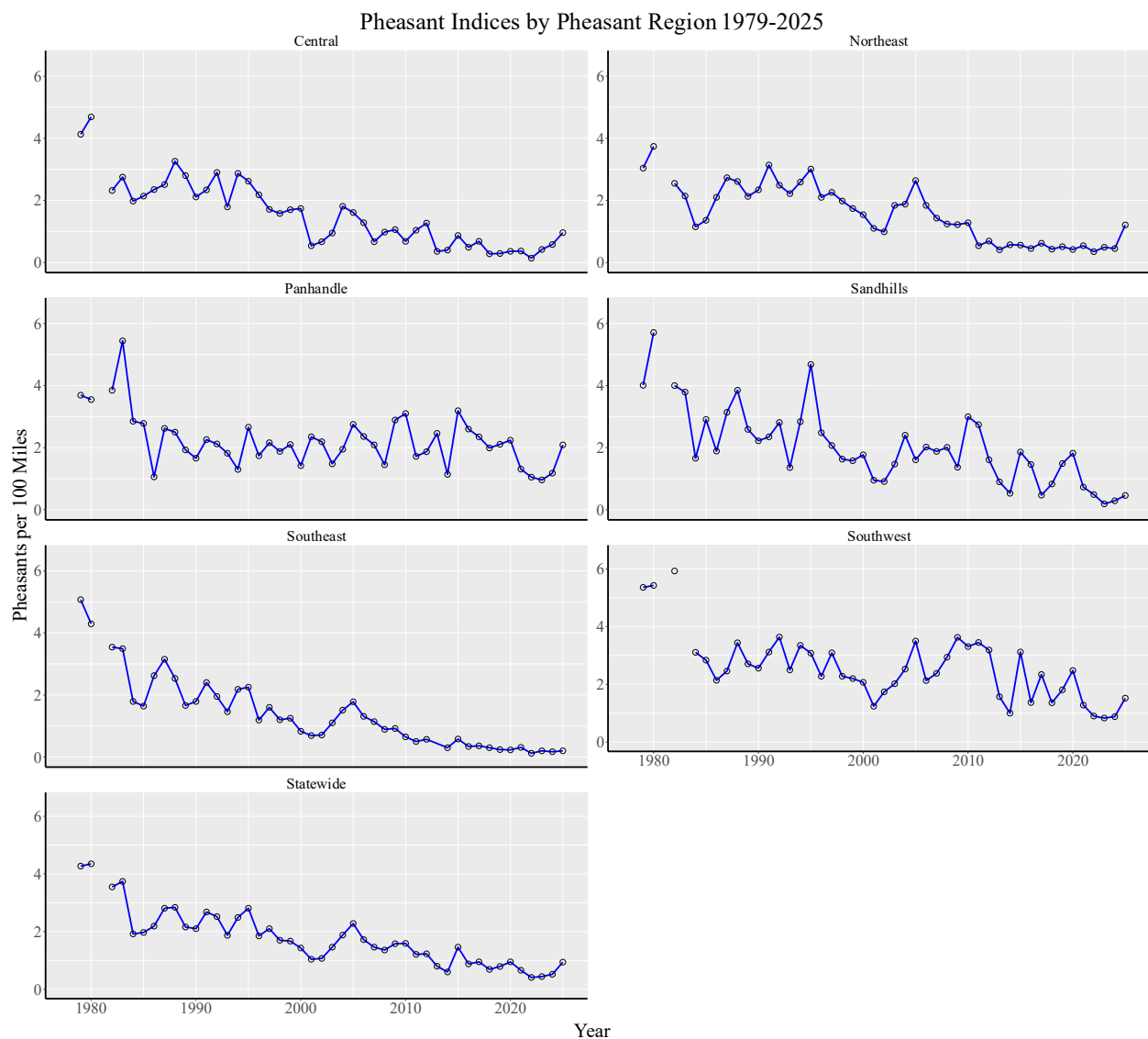
FIGURE 3. Regional and statewide time series (1979–2025) of pheasant population indices from the April Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Fig. 1).

TABLE 4. Northern bobwhite indices from the 2025 April Rural Mail Carrier Survey by bobwhite management zone (Fig. 2). Carrier means are weighted by miles traveled per carrier.

Zone	Mean Bobwhites per 100 miles & 90% Confidence Limits	Percent Difference from:			
		2024	Mean 2020-2024	Mean 2015-2024	Mean 2005-2024
East Central	0.08 (0.00-0.17)	105	-21	-42	-21
North Central	0.17 (0.00-0.38)	-59	-34	-42	-24
Northeast	0.03 (0.00-0.22)	-84	-64	-47	-50
Republican	0.22 (0.00-0.46)	94	69	18	40
Southeast	0.17 (0.00-0.40)	154	217	11	27
West Platte	0.09 (0.00-0.29)	135	162	23	33
Not in Range	0.08 (0.00-0.31)	335	77	45	64
Statewide	0.10 (0.07-0.16)	-24	3	-17	-2

FIGURE 4. Regional and statewide time series (1979–2025) of bobwhite population indices from the April Rural Mail Carrier Survey by bobwhite management zone (Fig. 2).

TABLE 5. Cottontail indices from the 2025 April Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Fig. 1). Carrier means are weighted by miles traveled per carrier.

Region	Mean Cottontails per 100 miles & 90% Confidence Limits	Percent Difference from:			
		2024	Mean 2020-2024	Mean 2015-2024	Mean 2005-2024
Central	0.53 (0.26-0.79)	5	35	11	1
Northeast	0.57 (0.00–1.17)	53	47	50	11
Panhandle	0.69 (0.01-1.38)	86	93	184	81
Sandhills	0.20 (0.00-0.87)	-10	33	-21	-21
Southeast	0.49 (0.00-1.08)	20	23	15	4
Southwest	0.62 (0.00-1.26)	7	20	3	9
Statewide	0.53 (0.43-0.63)	25	38	23	11

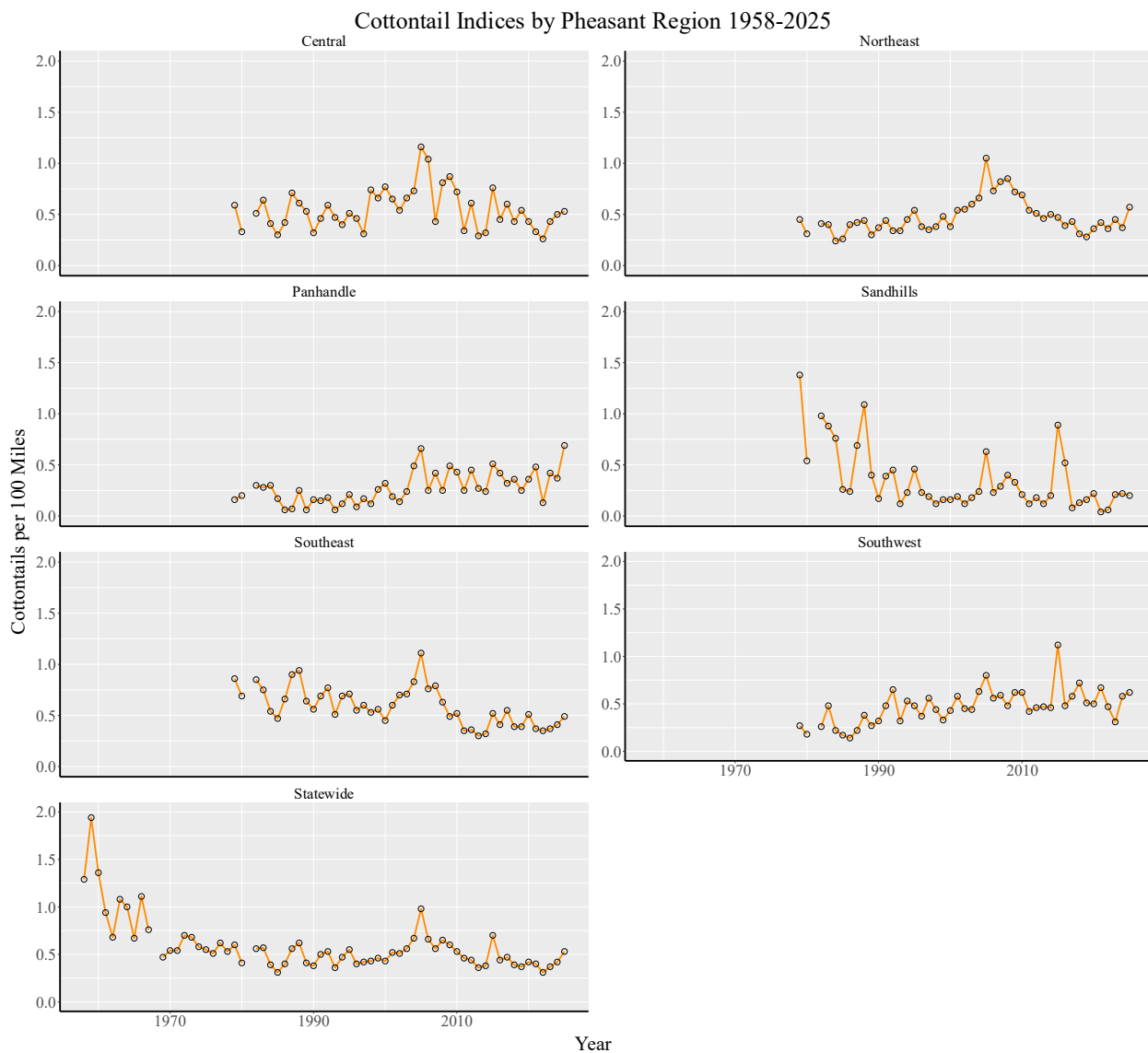
FIGURE 5. Regional and statewide time series (1958–2025) of cottontail population indices from the April Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Fig.1).

TABLE 6. Wild turkey indices from the 2025 April Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Fig. 1). Carrier means are weighted by miles traveled per carrier.

Region	Mean Wild Turkeys per 100 miles & 90% Confidence Limits	Percent Difference from:			
		2024	Mean 2020-2024	Mean 2015-2024	Mean 2005-2024
Central	4.54 (3.62-5.45)	7	28	7	-27
Northeast	1.70 (0.00-3.75)	44	-15	-28	-33
Panhandle	5.32 (2.98-7.67)	207	125	148	174
Sandhills	5.14 (2.81-7.48)	25	3	-11	-38
Southeast	1.17 (0.00-3.20)	-31	-34	-46	-60
Southwest	7.22 (5.02-9.41)	18	21	-18	-28
Statewide	3.39 (3.04-3.75)	22	12	-8	-24

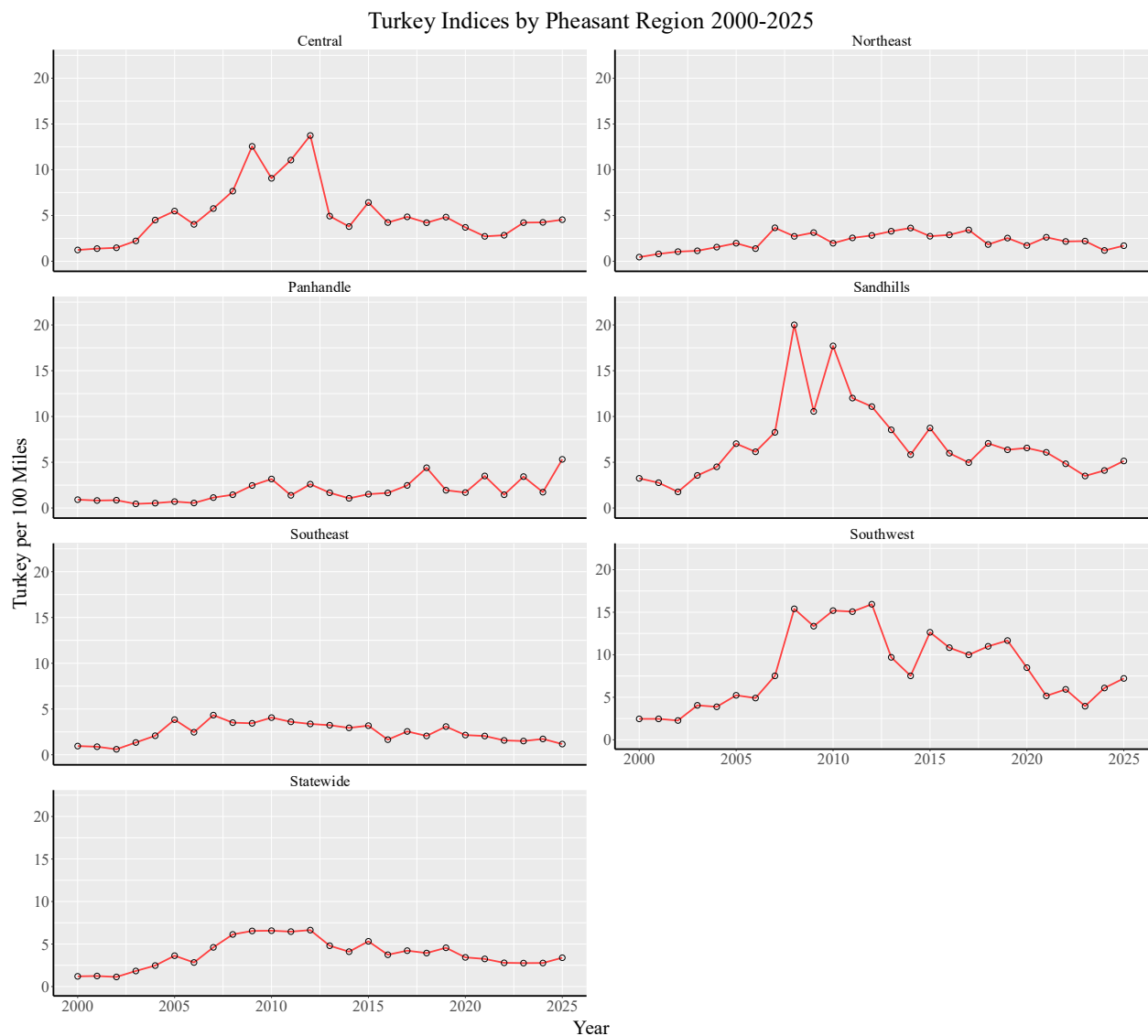
FIGURE 6. Regional and statewide time series (2000–2025) of wild turkey population indices from the April Rural Mail Carrier Survey by pheasant management region (Fig. 1).

TABLE 7. Number of cards and percent of total cards ($n = 339$) that contained zero observations by species. For the April 2025 survey, 15% ($n=51$) of cards contained zero counts for all species compared to the April 2024 survey in which 12% ($n=69$) of card contained zero counts for all species. Percentages by species from the 2024 survey are reported for comparison.

	Pheasant	Quail	Grouse	Wild Turkey	Cottontail	Jackrabbit
Nº of Cards	141	305	289	101	174	314
Percent (2025)	42	90	85	30	51	93
Percent (2024)	56	92	88	45	53	95

We appreciate the time, support, and valuable information from all the mail carriers that participated in this survey.
Without the help from these carriers, this survey would not have been possible.
Thank you.