

abundance, and cannot be used to determine game abundance at any particular hunting area. Pre-hunt scouting is recommended. The full forecast is available online at OutdoorNebraska.gov/Upland.

All publicly accessible lands are displayed in the 2019-20 Public Access Atlas which is available at OutdoorNebraska.org/PublicAccessAtlas. Hard copies of the Atlas are available at all Game and Parks offices and wherever else hunting and fishing permits are sold. Additional properties open to public hunting, including tall wheat and milo stubble fields will be added to the online version of the Atlas in mid-October.

The hunting season for pheasant, quail and partridge is Oct. 26, 2019 – Jan. 31, 2020. The prairie grouse season is Sept. 1, 2019 – Jan. 31, 2020. Hunting permits may be purchased at OutdoorNebraska.org.

The Nebraska Upland Slam returns this fall for its second year. It invites hunters to try to take a pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, greater prairie chicken and northern bobwhite in the state. For more information, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/UplandSlam.

Nonresidents can get a start on preparing for their Nebraska hunts using Trip Planners, located at OutdoorNebraska.gov/upland.

**NORTH DAKOTA
YOUTH WATERFOWL
HUNTING TRAILER
AVAILABLE**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and Ducks Unlimited co-sponsor a trailer full of waterfowl hunting gear that is available to families with young hunters.

Purchased by the Game and Fish Department's Encouraging Tomorrow's Hunters grant program, the trailer is designed for families who don't have the appropriate gear for their young hunters to hunt waterfowl. The equipment is donated by Avery Outdoors.

Use of the trailer is free, and it is equipped with goose and duck decoys for field hunting, and two bags of floating duck decoys and marsh seats for hunting a wetland.

For more information, or to reserve equipment, contact the Ducks Unlimited office in Bismarck at 701-355-3500.

**WETLAND CONDITIONS
GOOD FOR DUCK
HUNTING**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual fall wetland survey indicates good-to-excellent conditions for duck hunting throughout the state.

Andy Dinges, migratory game bird biologist, said the number of duck hunting wetlands are up about 65% statewide from a year ago, largely driven by record fall wetland conditions in the south central and southeast regions of the state. The northwest, north cen-

tral and northeast regions have also seen 30-37% increases in the number of duck hunting wetlands compared to last fall.

"Fall wetland records for the south central and southeast regions were easily broken, and duck hunting wetlands recorded in these regions are up about 300% from average," Dinges said.

Wetland conditions had been declining for a few years now, Dinges mentioned, but adequate snowmelt and abundant rainfall throughout spring and summer have dramatically improved wetland conditions in the state.

"However, the north central and northeast regions of the state are still recovering from drought conditions experienced over the last few years, and the number of duck hunting wetlands in these regions remain slightly below average," Dinges said.

The quality of waterfowl hunting in North Dakota is largely determined by weather conditions and migration patterns. Dinges said good reproduction for ducks in traditional breeding areas this year also make for good fall hunting potential in North Dakota. However, he said given these wet conditions, hunters may encounter wetlands with extensive flooded vegetation, potentially making hunting difficult in some areas.

"Hunters should always scout because of ever changing conditions and distribution of waterfowl," he added. "Hunters should also be cautious driving off-trail to avoid soft spots, and while encountering areas of tall vegetation that could be a fire hazard."

The fall wetland survey is conducted annually in mid-September, just prior to the waterfowl hunting season to provide an assessment of conditions duck hunters can expect.

**PHEASANT, SHARPTAIL
AND PARTRIDGE NUMBERS
UP**

North Dakota's roadside surveys conducted in late July and August indicate total pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse and gray partridge numbers are up from last year.

State Game and Fish Department upland game biologist RJ Gross said the survey shows total pheasants observed per 100 miles are up 10% from last year. In addition, broods per 100 miles are up 17%, while the average brood size is down 5%. The final summary is based on 275 survey runs made along 101 brood routes across North Dakota.

"This was the first year in a while that we've had good residual cover to start the year, and good weather for nesting and brood-rearing," Gross said. "In the southwest portion of the state, which is our primary pheasant district and most popular hunting area, local populations are slowly improving."

Gross said hunters should not overlook pheasant opportunities in northwest and southeast North Dakota. "Two good years of chick production should translate to more birds for hunters to pursue," he said.

Statistics from the northwest indicate pheasants are up 49% from last year, with broods up 75%. Observers recorded five broods and 39 pheasants per 100 miles. Average brood size was six.

Results from the southeast show birds are up 32% from last year, and the number of broods up 27%. Observers counted six broods and 51 birds per 100 miles. The average brood size was six.

Statistics from southwestern North Dakota indicate total pheasants were down 7% and broods observed up 2% from 2018. For every 100 survey miles, observers counted an average of six broods and 41 pheasants. The average brood size was five chicks.

The northeast district, generally containing secondary pheasant habitat with lower pheasant numbers compared to the rest of the state, showed two broods and 15 pheasants per 100 miles. Average brood size was four.

Sharptails observed per 100 miles are up 113% statewide from 2018, and partridge are up 58%.

Upland game management supervisor Jesse Kolar said sharptail numbers are still roughly 50% below 2012-15. "However, we observed slight increases in all metrics this year during our surveys, especially in counties east of the Missouri River where we observed the highest numbers of grouse per 100 miles since 2013," he said.

Brood survey results show statewide increases in number of grouse and broods observed per 100 miles, and in average brood size. Observers recorded 1.7 sharptail broods and 13.6 sharptails per 100 miles. Average brood size was five.

Although partridge numbers have shown a slight increase, Gross said the majority of the partridge harvest is incidental while hunters pursue grouse or pheasants. Partridge densities in general, he said, are too low to target. Observers recorded 0.5 partridge broods and 6.8 partridge per 100 miles. Average brood size was 10.

The 2019 regular pheasant season opens Oct. 12 and continues through Jan. 5, 2020. The two-day youth pheasant hunting weekend, when legally licensed residents and nonresidents ages 15 and younger can hunt statewide, is set for Oct. 5-6.

The 2019 grouse and partridge seasons open Sept. 14 and continue through Jan. 5, 2020.

**SOUTH DAKOTA
GFP COMMISSION
ACCEPTS PETITION TO
ADJUST DOG TRAINING
DAYS ON PUBLIC LANDS**

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission accepted a citizen petition to adjust the days when dog training on horseback can occur on public lands.

Current rules only allow dog trainers to ride horses while training dogs on public lands on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from the first Friday of August through the first Sunday in September.

The petition requested a change from Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays to Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, citing the age of chicks in early August. The petitioner contends that disturbing young grouse or pheasants on three consecutive days could potentially break up covies, making birds more susceptible to predators.

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Photos From The Field



English Setter: Steven Triedman Corky's Reflective Wear Cranston, RI

The proposal for this rule change will be on the agenda of the GFP Commission's next meeting, which will be held Oct. 3-4 at the Americlnn in Chamberlain Comments can also be submitted online at gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions or mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, SD 57501. To be included in the public record and to be considered by the commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence, and meet the submission deadline of 72 hours before the public hearing (not including the day of the public hearing).

THE NEXT 100 YEARS – PHEASANT HUNTING BEGINS SECOND CENTURY IN SOUTH DAKOTA The second century of pheasant hunting in South Dakota will begin in October, kicking off another year of our state's robust hunting heritage. The annual pheasant brood count conducted by South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) indicated that, despite a tough winter and wet spring, bird numbers are still plentiful.

"South Dakota offers the greatest opportunity in the country for pheasant hunting," said Kelly Hepler, Department Secretary for South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks. "Pheasant reproduction in 2019 is right in there with other years and lands open to public hunting are abundant, which means our second century of pheasant hunting will be off to a good start."

In a statewide snapshot, numbers are on par with the previous two years. Even with the historic winter snowfall and above average precipitation, the pheasant per mile index remained nearly unchanged from last year for 7 of the 13 survey areas outlined in the 2019 brood survey report. In addition, it is highly likely that flooded ditches and approximately 3.8 million acres of unplanted crop fields reduced the number of pheasants using roadside habitat. These factors likely contributed to variability in the 2019 index because survey conditions were noticeably different compared to 2018. View the full report at gfp.sd.gov/pheasant.

For the long term, providing high quality habitat is key to sustaining healthy pheasant populations. Behind Governor Kristi Noem's Second Century Habitat Initiative, South Dakota has been doing just that.

"Enhancing habitat in South Dakota touches every aspect of life in our state," Noem said. "We must be responsible in protecting these resources, creating healthy habitats, and supporting growth and health in our natural populations. My Second Century Initiative is about families, introducing kids to the adventure of the outdoors, and conserving our outdoor culture for the next generation. Enhancing habitat is a crucial step in strengthening the next 100 years of our outdoor traditions."

Hepler agrees that good habitat is beneficial for every species in our state.

"We are committed to the Second Century Initiative," said Hepler. "By working with Governor Noem, landowners and other conservation partners, we will improve existing habitat and create new habitat op-

portunities. These efforts will undoubtedly help provide a successful second century of pheasant hunting to the next generation. South Dakota is the best place to hunt pheasants and will be for a long time."

South Dakota's 2019 traditional pheasant season runs October 19 through January 5, with a youth season from October 5-9. A resident-only season runs October 12-14.

The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks provides sustainable outdoor recreational opportunities through responsible management of our state's parks, fisheries and wildlife by fostering partnerships, cultivating stewardship and safely connecting people with the outdoors.

WISCONSIN

**WISCONSIN RUFFED
GROUSE SURVEY RESULTS
INDICATE AN INCREASE
IN BREEDING GROUSE**

Roadside ruffed grouse surveys completed this spring show statewide drumming activity increased 41% between 2018 and 2019. This increase aligns with the generally predictable grouse population cycle. The large increase in 2019 has made up for much of the unanticipated decline seen in 2018 drumming surveys and appears to put Wisconsin back on track for approaching the next cyclical high in the ruffed grouse population. For complete survey results, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keywords "reports."

"Grouse are an important resource to Wisconsin's outdoor enthusiasts and economy," said Mark Witecha, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources upland wildlife ecologist. "As we enter the brood rearing season, weather conditions over the coming weeks will be critical in determining what grouse enthusiasts see in the grouse woods this fall, but increased drumming activity is a good sign that there were more breeding grouse on

the landscape this year."

Summer ruffed grouse surveys in spring 2019 showed statewide drumming activity increased 41 percent over 2018.Photo credit: Jerry Davis

Roadside surveys to monitor the number of breeding grouse have been conducted by staff from the department, U.S. Forest Service, tribal employees and numerous grouse enthusiasts and volunteers since 1964.

The survey results showed a 41% increase statewide over 2018 levels. The central part of the state showed an increase of 35% in drumming activity, and the northern forest showed an increase of 48% in drumming activity. These two areas comprise the primary grouse range in Wisconsin. Decreases in drumming activity detected by the roadside survey occurred in the southwest part of the state (-17%) as well as the southeast (-50%), but these areas are not within the primary range for grouse. The drumming activity in southwestern and southeastern Wisconsin are at or near historic lows and likely would not significantly add to grouse abundance in the state.

"Ruffed grouse rely on dense, young forest cover resulting from disturbances such as fire and logging," said Witecha. "Beyond actively managing state-owned lands, Wisconsin DNR is working to provide suitable grouse habitat through collaborative efforts such as the Wisconsin Young For-

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est Partnership [exit DNR] and jointly-funded Forest Wildlife Specialist positions with Ruffed Grouse Society and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service. These partnerships provide technical and financial assistance for delivering young forest management on private lands, benefiting ruffed grouse and other wildlife species by helping maintain healthy and diverse forest communities."

The department is currently working with partners to develop a ruffed grouse management plan. The draft plan will be released for public review later this summer, with associated public meetings to be held during the public comment period.

For more information regarding grouse hunting in Wisconsin, search keywords "ruffed grouse hunting."

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