

on the online Game Bird Brood Survey was 5.6, also slightly higher than the 5.3 poults per brood observed last year.

"The Spring Breeding Pheasant survey showed a decline in breeding pheasants of 30 percent. The downturn in pheasant numbers suggested by both the spring surveys and brood count data in part likely reflects the impacts of harsh weather conditions during the past several winters," Dhuey added. "More problematic long-term, however, is the deteriorating habitat base in Wisconsin. With high corn and soybean prices, many acres previously in grassland cover have been converted to row crops. For example, we've lost more than 300,000 acres of Conservation Reserve Program enrollments state-wide in the last 15 years. We'll not likely see a significant rebound in pheasant numbers until we find a way to replace these acres on the landscape."

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Ruffed grouse seasons open September 17

Hunter safety should be a top priority

The 2011 fall wild turkey and ruffed grouse seasons are set to open at the start of shooting hours on Sept. 17, and state wildlife officials say that hunter prospects are good for both seasons.

Overall, Wisconsin's state-

wide wild turkey population remains strong and wildlife officials have maintained the number of fall turkey permits at 95,700, the same number that was offered during last year's fall turkey season.

"After 30 years of sustained population growth and expansion across the state, turkeys are now found statewide, and local populations will likely nudge upward or downward from year to year as weather determines annual levels of survival and reproduction," says Scott Walter, upland game ecologist for the Department of Natural Resources.

Watson says the spring 2011 Wisconsin turkey harvest was down 16 percent, reflecting a series of relatively hard winters, wet springs, and snow, wind, and rain early in the 2011 spring season that limited hunter access to birds.

"Harvest during the fall season does not play a significant role in turkey population dynamics, and hunters venturing into the fall woods should expect a hunt similar to that of 2010," he said.

As during the 2010 fall season, hunters may use dogs statewide to hunt wild turkey this fall.

Ruffed grouse drumming counts up

Spring drumming survey data suggest that Wisconsin's ruffed grouse population increased 38 percent statewide between 2010 and 2011, and hunters should therefore expect a rewarding season this fall. Due to a variety

of factors, ruffed grouse populations cycle up and down, with peaks occurring approximately every 10 years.

In northern Wisconsin, survey data suggest a current grouse population as high as any since the early 1970s. 2011 likely marks the current peak population for grouse in Wisconsin, and hunters should therefore plan to take advantage of outstanding grouse hunting opportunities this fall.

Hunters are reminded of the requirement for blaze orange on ground blinds on DNR lands during any Gun Deer Season (please see page 9 of the 2011 Wisconsin Small Game Hunting Regulations for more information). Ground blinds on DNR lands left unattended must also have the owner's name and address or DNR Customer ID# attached near the door opening. Ground blinds may not be left out overnight. Please note that these ground blind rules do not apply to ground blinds being used for hunting waterfowl or to blinds built only out of natural vegetation found on the DNR property.

Grouse and turkey hunters should also note that during any gun or muzzleloader deer season, including the Oct. 8-9 youth deer hunt, antlerless hunts, and CWD hunts (see the 2011 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations for season dates), blaze orange clothing is required. A hat, if worn, must be at least 50 percent blaze orange.

Grouse hunters are encour-