



Pheasants Forever's 2006 Pheasant Hunting Forecast

The Glory Days are Back

For Immediate Release
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Overview: The 2005 pheasant hunting season was a year to remember across the upper Midwest. South Dakota maintained its hold as the "Pheasant Capital" with an estimated harvest of over 1.9 million roosters, a 40-year high. Iowa, North Dakota and Kansas all checked in with big 800,000 bird totals. Nebraska recorded its best harvest in five years and Minnesota enjoyed its best fall in 40 years. Unfortunately, a wet and cool spring coupled with a summer drought has prevented another mild winter from translating into the elusive MONSTER pheasant year we've all been awaiting. Nevertheless, much of the range will see similar pheasant totals to the excellent harvests enjoyed in 2005. The reason for the upswing in pheasant numbers is simple - HABITAT. More habitat acres are enabling pheasants to take advantage of favorable weather conditions. However, 2007 is a critical year for pheasants, quail, and all hunters. The 2007 Federal Farm Bill will be debated over the coming year. Within the Farm Bill is the 39.2 million-acre Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that is largely responsible for the birds we will enjoy chasing this fall. So, this November when your mind is on hunting, don't forget to vote. And as a voting hunter, learn how your candidates stand on CRP and conservation issues then make an informed choice. It will matter to you and your children's success during future pheasant hunts.

NOTE: ALWAYS CONSULT STATE HUNTING REGULATIONS AND SEASON DATES BEFORE TAKING TO THE FIELD

California: A wet spring coupled with a severe hot spell in July may have hurt reproduction in the Sacramento Valley, while better production conditions helped the San Joaquin Valley's pheasant population. The Sacramento Valley's agricultural lands traditionally provide the best pheasant habitat. A number of state wildlife management areas and national wildlife refuges in the Sacramento Valley are open to public hunting. Pheasant hunters generally bag about 150,000 wild roosters annually in California. *Season Opener: November 11*

Colorado: Colorado continues to just miss hitting the pheasant jackpot. Another mild winter brought excellent bird numbers into the spring for nesting and produced spring call counts not seen since the 1970s. Unfortunately, a summer drought prevented the wheat and CRP fields from greening up in time for early nesting hens. July rains should have helped the late nesters though. As a result, Colorado pheasant hunters should expect to see another season similar to, or slightly lower than, 2005 when 59,000 roosters were harvested. Colorado's best pheasant range is the triangular area from Sterling to Holyoke to Burlington. *Season Opener: November 11*

Idaho: Last year, hunters saw an improved harvest nearing 100,000 roosters. Thanks to good winter and spring weather conditions, Idaho pheasant hunters have a similar season in store. Landowners are also reporting a lot of Hungarian partridge, which is exciting considering last year's bumper 44,000-Hun harvest. State biologist Don Kemner credits the improved bird numbers to CRP acres in the southeast and a new partnership with NRCS that has resulted in 10,000 new acres enrolled in Federal farm programs. Kemner is also excited about the potential for habitat improvements on 100,000 new CREP acres on the Eastern Snake River Plain. The Lewiston area; and the southern region of the state from Weiser to Twin Falls and Pocatello to Grace hold the most roosters. *Multiple*

Illinois: The state's May call count increased statewide by 11.4 percent and the August roadside count showed a 7 percent increase statewide. In contrast, the North American Breeding Bird Survey conducted in June recorded 19 percent fewer pheasants than in 2005. State biologist John Cole estimates that Illinois hunters will see a few more birds in the fields this year with the central region of the state holding the most birds and the northern region showing the biggest increases over last fall. The state's 2005 harvest reached an estimated 150,000 roosters, and Cole expects this year's bag to total over 180,000 roosters by season's end. Undisturbed nesting cover is the key habitat ingredient to adding more roosters to Illinois' fields. Due to the state's high rental rates, there are currently only 200,000 acres enrolled into CRP in the state's pheasant range out of an available 1.5 million acres. *Season Opener: November 4*

Indiana: Winter and spring weather produced favorable nesting conditions. Indiana biologist Bob Porch expects hunters to harvest their normal 20,000 roosters this hunting season. He points to Benton County and the surrounding counties as the state's best pheasant range. However, counties in the northeast along the Michigan border also provide good bird numbers with better access. He expects IN's 20,000 CP 33 acres to help bird numbers. *Season Opener: November 10*

Iowa: After South Dakota, Iowa has traditionally harvested the second most roosters in the country. Last year, that harvest totaled 806,601 roosters, which was a 7 percent increase compared to the 2004 harvest estimate of 756,184. Over the last decade, Iowa pheasant hunters have harvested an average of 970,000 roosters. While that is an impressive total for most states, it does indicate a long-term drop for Iowa. This past decade (1996-05) is the first time in Iowa's history that the 10-yr pheasant harvest estimate has fallen under 1 million roosters. The reason for the steady drop in harvest totals is due to the gradual loss of Iowa's pheasant habitat. In fact, state biologist Todd Bogenschutz estimates that Iowa has lost 30 percent of the upland habitat that existed just 15 years ago. The 2006 hunting season likely won't put Iowa back over the one million mark as the state's August roadside survey showed a 22 percent decline from 2005's report. That survey has led Bogenschutz to predict a 2006 pheasant harvest of 700,000 to 750,000 roosters. However, there is the possibility bird numbers are better than what the survey indicates. The state experienced a mild winter and good early production conditions. Bogenschutz noted there appeared to be an early pheasant hatch in parts of Iowa and the roadside survey likely did a poor job of counting these early birds, which leaves the door open for a better pheasant season than forecasted. Additionally, PF's Iowa biologist Dave Van Waus says that landowners are reporting more birds this year than the August roadside survey indicated. Nevertheless, even a down year in Iowa provides some of the country's best pheasant hunting opportunities. *Also, Iowa will become the Pheasant Capital of the World on January 19, 20, & 21, 2007 when PF's National Pheasant Fest comes to Des Moines.*

Season Opener: October 28

Kansas: With a 2005 harvest of around 800,000 roosters and a mild winter with good carryover, the stage was set for Kansas bird hunters to experience a landmark season in 2006. But drought hit during the spring production season. In Kansas, many pheasants nest in green wheat. This spring, due to the drought, the wheat was thin and didn't provide quality nesting cover. Poor green wheat often forces pheasants to use wheat stubble left over from last year as an alternative nesting sight. Unfortunately for nesting pheasants, spring tillage or seeding operations in wheat stubble destroys most nests in that habitat. Hen pheasants are often also killed while sitting tight on late-incubation nests. The drought also led to a wheat harvest 10 to 14 days earlier than normal, which happened to fall right at the peak of hatching. All these factors negatively impacted nesting success and brood survival in the state. Brood size seen during the state's summer roadside surveys was a relatively low 4.9 chicks per brood. Biologist Randy Rodgers reported a 21 percent drop in the state's roadside count compared to last year and he expects a 2006 fall pheasant harvest that may return to the 600,000 to 700,000 rooster range where it was in 2003 and 2004. Drought hit the state's western one-third the hardest, which is especially disappointing considering last season was likely the best hunting that part of the state had experienced in 20 years. The bright spots, where the drought was mitigated by timely rains, include the north central counties from Norton to Republic including the northern half of Graham, Rooks, and Osborne Counties. The area from Pratt to Gray County should also produce good bird numbers again this fall. Overall, Kansas hunters will still find good bird numbers, but with a higher proportion of wily adult roosters than last year and with more spotty distribution. CRP acres that were released for emergency haying and grazing have altered some Walk-In Hunting Areas however. **Season Opener: November 4 (this is a week earlier than the traditional Kansas opening day for pheasants. Note: Quail will not open until November 11).**

Michigan: A mild winter and good spring production conditions should create a pheasant season similar to, or slightly better, than last year. Michiganders typically harvest around 110,000 roosters a year. Grassland habitat for nesting cover is the key to adding pheasants to the landscape in the "Great Lake's State." Michigan's CREP has an 80,000-acre allotment and the acres currently enrolled in CREP are providing exceptional habitat for pheasants, particularly in the state's Thumb region. **Season Opener: Multiple**

Minnesota: Last year, Minnesota pheasant hunters experienced the state's best pheasant harvest in 40 years with 586,000 roosters bagged. In fact, Minnesota hunters have reached the half million harvest mark in two of the last three years. With the state's 2006 roadside survey up another 12 percent over last year, and 75 percent above the ten-year average, hunters from the "Land of 10,000 Lakes" are eager to uncase their shotguns this fall. The state's survey showed an above-average number of adults carried over due to a mild winter and a 13 percent increase in broods compared to last year. Gains in grassland acres are responsible for returning Minnesota's bird numbers to the "good ol' days" of the Soil Bank Era. In fact, state biologist Sharon Goetz estimates that within the state's pheasant range, protected grasslands account for about 6 percent of the landscape, the highest number since the mid 1990s. Farm programs make up the largest portion of protected grasslands in the state. The state's PF chapters in Pheasants Forever's 1982 birth state can be proud of their role in the dramatic pheasant turnaround in Minnesota. **Season Opener: October 14**

Missouri: The northern one-third of the "Show Me State" is the pheasant range with the northeast and northwest corners holding the most CRP acres and consequently the most birds. In fact, Missouri hunters are blessed with the grand slam of pheasant, quail, dove, and woodcock across their state's northern tier. With favorable winter and spring weather

conditions, hunters should expect to see a pheasant harvest in line with their 30,000 bird average. **Season Opener: Multiple**

Montana: A mild winter brought a lot of birds through to a moist spring with good nesting conditions. The summer's drought is not anticipated to have a negative impact on numbers. Overall, bird hunting in Montana should be slightly better than last year. A typical Montana hunting season boasts a mixed bag with 140,000 pheasants harvested, 60,000 Hungarian partridges bagged, and 70,000 sharp-tail grouse shot. CRP fields adjacent to small grain fields provide the best opportunities, especially in eastern Montana around Sidney, and along the Milk River, in the Mission Valley, and in the Yellowstone Valley. **Season Opener: October 7**

Nebraska: Pheasant hunters harvested an estimated 437,000 roosters in the "cornhusker state" last year, the highest harvest total in five years. With a mild winter and relatively normal spring production conditions, the stage is set for a similar season this fall. The state's July rural mail carrier survey indicated a 7 percent drop in pheasants, while the state's August roadside survey exhibited a 6 percent increase over last year. The highest abundance of birds can be found in the state's southwestern counties, followed by those in the northeast. Nebraska also offers excellent hunting opportunities on private lands through CRP-MAP (Managed Access Program), which improves habitat and provides public access on nearly 200,000 CRP acres annually. The state's CREP, Corners for Wildlife, and Focus on Pheasants programs are also creating wildlife habitat. **Season Opener: October 28**

New Jersey: In no other state is urban sprawl having a more dramatic impact on wildlife than in New Jersey. In fact, the "Garden State" is the most densely human populated state in the nation. As a result, the state's pheasant harvest has plunged to under 5,000 wild roosters a season. In a unique habitat initiative, PF in New Jersey is working with golf courses to improve grassland wildlife habitat on golf courses. **Season Opener: Multiple**

New York: A mild winter was greeted by heavy rains in May, June, and July. In fact, precipitation was way up during June's primary nesting season. Those rains will likely lead to a New York pheasant season slightly below their 100,000 bird average harvest. The succession of farmland to forests is the primary culprit to the state's decline in populations. The Lakes-Plains region of the state between Buffalo and Syracuse provide the best habitat. **Season Opener: Multiple**

North Dakota: South Dakota doesn't have the monopoly on pheasants, just ask their neighbors to the North. In 2005, the estimated harvest topped 809,000 roosters in NoDak. According to state biologist Stan Kohn, last year was the best pheasant season since the Soil Bank Era over 40 years ago. And, the big news is that this year could be even better. Along with over 3 million acres of CRP habitat, winter weather plays a key role in North Dakota. Those ND roosters were blessed with an extremely mild winter. In fact, January 2006 was one of the warmest on record. A mild winter led to excellent carryover coming into a spring nesting season with good conditions across much of the state. However, portions of the south-central and southwest were extremely dry this summer and may have affected brood size to a small degree. Although the August roadside counts are still being tabulated, Kohn estimates that the birds and brood numbers could be up by as much as 30 to 50 percent based on the preliminary data. The state's best pheasant range exists south of Interstate 94 with the southeast corner and portions of the southwest providing the state's highest bird populations. **Season Opener: October 14**

Ohio: A wet and cool production season probably mitigated a mild winter with good carryover. As a result, Ohio pheasant hunters should expect to be around their annual average harvest of 200,000 roosters. Hunters in the "Buckeye State" have many reasons to be excited for future pheasant hunts with more habitat acres on the ground than any time in recent memory. There are currently 330,000 acres of CRP in Ohio; the most ever. And, the state's three CREP programs (Lake Erie, Upper Big Walnut, and Scioto River) are adding thousands of acres of habitat to the landscape for pheasants, quail, and a variety of other wildlife species. Ohio's best pheasant range exists in the north central, central, and western regions of the state. **Season Opener: November 3**

Oklahoma: The north central and panhandle portions of Oklahoma present the best opportunities for pheasant hunting. Pheasant hunting is largely relegated to private lands with harvest on public lands considered a bonus to the quail bag. Over the past three seasons, the average annual harvest has been just shy of 100,000 with an estimated 97,037 roosters harvested during the 2005-2006 season. Spring call count indices were 6 percent higher this spring than 2005, suggesting a good carry-over of birds. However, the production season has been plagued by drought conditions and few reports are coming in on brood sightings. The fall roadside surveys have yet to be complete, but will be available on the Department's website (www.wildlifedepartment.com) when complete. **Season Opener: December 1**

Oregon: Hunters experienced one of the better pheasant seasons in a while bagging 61,276 birds last year. However, a wet spring will likely hurt production and lead to a slight drop this year. The Columbia Basin and northern Malheur County offer the state's best habitat. However, don't overlook the nostalgia of visiting Linn County, where pheasants were first introduced to the U.S. and where the local PF chapter is working hard to improve habitat acres. Bird hunters can also find excellent chukar and quail hunting in Oregon. In fact, hunters bagged over 200,000 chukars and 100,000 quail last year. PF is also excited about a new partnership with the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife to employ a new habitat specialist to create more habitat acres for pheasants and quail in Malheur County. *Pheasant Opener: October 14*

Pennsylvania: Although a mild winter resulted in good carryover coming into the spring, extremely heavy June rains likely had a negative impact on production. As a result, hunters should expect to see a season below the average annual harvest of 200,000 ringnecks. The state's CREP has a maximum enrollment of 265,000 acres with 165,000 currently under contract. Those CREP lands are having a positive impact on pheasant and other wildlife populations. Some reclaimed strip mines are also helping create new habitat acres as well. The state's best pheasant range is from York in the southeast up to the southcentral part of the state. Rural counties south of Pittsburgh also hold some good wild populations as well. *Season Opener: October 21*

South Dakota: Pheasant hunters everywhere will be excited to hear that "The Pheasant Capital" will again live up to its nickname. Winter began with an ice storm in late November that had hunters and state biologists concerned. Fortunately, the cold snap was short-lived, the ice melted, and a mild winter lasted the remainder of the season. Spring nesting conditions were favorable with ideal dry, warm conditions. The stage was set for the MONSTER pheasant season of the century when a summer drought hit the central and north-central part of the state. The near-record precipitation lows impacted brood sizes and chick survival, resulting in the state's summer brood survey showing a 6 percent drop in bird numbers from 2005. In essence, South Dakota has about the same pheasant numbers as last season, which happened to set a 40-year high harvest with more than 1.9 million roosters bagged. Incidentally, that harvest of nearly 2 million birds is double the size of any other state's annual pheasant harvest. There is no secret behind South Dakota's bird numbers; 1.4 million Conservation Reserve Program acres. Reauthorization of CRP in the 2007 Farm Bill is critical for South Dakota's pheasant population and the tourism industry built around the state's favorite bird. *Season Opener: October 21*

Texas: Hot and dry spring conditions will likely have a negative impact on nest success and chick survival. As a result, Texas pheasant hunters will have a hard time reaching the 59,000-rooster total bagged during the 2005 season. The Texas Panhandle is home to the state's pheasant range around wheat and milo ag lands. *Season Opener: Multiple*

Utah: Utah pheasant hunting will be fair throughout most of the state in 2006. Hunters should expect to see more pheasants in the central and northern regions this year as a result of above average precipitation stimulating favorable habitat conditions. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is kicking off a three-year pilot Walk-in Access Program in northern Utah providing access to private lands in the program. For info visit: <http://wildlife.utah.gov/walkinaccess/>. Best pheasant hunting can be found in Box Elder, Cache, Duchesne, Millard, Sevier, and Utah counties. *Multiple*

Washington: Late spring rains likely had a negative impact on nesting conditions causing a variable forecast for Washington roosters. Last year's 110,000 bird harvest will likely see a slight drop with Whitman, Grant, Walla Walla, and Yakima Counties offering the best opportunities. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife does have a new pheasant habitat enhancement program called "Partnerships for Pheasants." The program works with private landowners in southeastern Washington to improve habitat adjacent to riparian areas and in CRP fields. *Multiple*

Wisconsin: Although the spring crowing count was down by 10 percent and rural mail carrier surveys indicated a 17 percent drop in the "Dairy State's" pheasant population, DNR biologist Andrea Mezera believes weather conditions during the survey periods negatively skewed the results. According to Mezera, good nesting conditions and landowner reports lead her to believe that Wisconsin's pheasant season should be similar to last year's 200,000 ringneck harvest. The state's best areas are between Madison and Green Bay, as well as in the counties of Polk and St. Croix near the west central Minnesota border. *Season Opener: October 14*

Wyoming: Drought conditions hurt production this year. Look for Goshen County to provide the best bird numbers with Big Horn, Sheridan, and Washakie counties also providing pheasant hunting opportunities. *Season Opener: Multiple*

Canada: Don't overlook our hockey-loving neighbors to the north when you think of upland bird hunting, eh. Canada, especially southern Alberta, offers excellent pheasant, Hun, and sharp-tailed grouse opportunities. Reports from the Brooks, Alberta area indicate a 10 percent increase in pheasant numbers during their spring call counts, setting a 20-year high. Sharpies appear to be down slightly, while Hun populations look strong. *Season Opener: Check, eh.*