

June 28, 2010

Pheasant Crowing Counts Completed

North Dakota's spring pheasant crowing count survey revealed a 6 percent decrease statewide compared to last year, according to Stan Kohn, upland game management supervisor for the state Game and Fish Department.

The number of crows heard in the northwest was down 16 percent from 2009, while counts in the southwest and southeast were relatively unchanged from last year. In the northeast where there are fewer birds, the counts decreased 10 percent.

"This past winter did not appear to have a role in the lower crowing counts," Kohn said. "It is probably the result of a lower number of adult birds surviving the winter of 2008-09, coupled with poor production in spring 2009 because of cool, wet weather at the time of the hatch, resulting in chick mortality and fewer young entering the population last fall."

Kohn said the good news from this spring is the quality of cover will benefit birds and broods of all upland species. "Pheasants are finding nesting and brooding cover in fair quantity and great quality," he added. "Native, warm season plants are doing extremely well and one would anticipate a good number of insects and eventually grasshoppers to become available with this type of habitat component."

In addition, the early June weather has been better than the last two springs. "Recent downpours in some areas may jeopardize broods in some localized spots, but we have not experienced cool temperatures associated with these showers," Kohn said. "I think production should be much better than in 2008 and 2009."

Even though the crowing count survey provides good trend data on the status of roosters, Kohn said it does not provide information on the status of the adult hen population. "Hens are the segment of the population that determines the fall population," he said. "In spring 2009, field personnel noted the low number of hens with roosters (1-2 hens per rooster) indicating the hen population might be smaller than usual. This spring there were no such observations reported."

Spring crowing count data has little to do with predicting the fall population. It does not measure population density, but is an indicator of the spring rooster population based on a trend of number of crows heard. Brood surveys, which begin in mid-July and are completed by September, provide an indicator of the summer's pheasant production and provide insight into what to expect for a fall pheasant population.

Pheasant crowing counts are conducted each spring throughout North Dakota. Observers drive specified 20-mile routes, stopping at predetermined intervals, and counting the number of pheasant roosters heard crowing over a two-minute period during the stop. The number of pheasant crows heard is compared to previous years' data.