

NDG&F July 1st Newsletter

Game and Fish Tallies Spring Pheasant, Grouse Numbers

North Dakota's spring pheasant population index is up slightly from last year, while sharp-tailed grouse numbers are down slightly, according to recent surveys conducted by State Game and Fish Department biologists.

Aaron Robinson, upland game management supervisor, said the number of pheasant roosters heard on the spring crowing count survey was up just about 2 percent statewide. Numbers in the southeast were down from last year, Robinson said, while "the other regions from west to central were up slightly, but not enough to say there's a big increase from last year."

Sharp-tailed grouse counts on spring dancing grounds or leks were down about 6 percent statewide from last year. "We were kind of expecting that," Robinson added. "We had some dry weather last year and production wasn't as good."

While the spring counts provide a good indicator of the number of breeding birds in the two populations, Robinson says it's primarily early summer weather that influences hunting success in the fall. "You have to have the right conditions to produce a good hatch," he said. "You don't want really wet, cold years, and you don't want dry years. Dry years don't produce those insects that chicks need to survive those first 10 days."

Game and Fish biologists will start their summer upland game brood counts in mid-July, and Robinson said that will lead to more precise fall population predictions. "That's when we really start to understand what our production was for the year."

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.