

SOUTHEAST WYOMING UPLAND GAME BIRD HUNTING FORECAST

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WHEATLAND - Habitat conditions in southeast Wyoming have Wyoming Game and Fish biologists predicting limited success for sharp-tailed grouse and pheasant hunters this fall.

Above average temperatures and below average spring moisture have resulted in poor sharp-tail brood rearing habitat in Platte, Goshen and Laramie counties.

"Drought conditions prevented grass, forb and insect production, which are critical for chick survival," says Game and Fish wildlife biologist Martin Hicks.

Emergency haying and grazing practices on lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) will also affect sharp-tailed grouse and pheasant habitat. Emergency haying and grazing is used as a drought relief tool for ranchers needing suitable forage and pasture lands for feeding livestock, but landowners must comply with certain restrictions.

"Only about ten percent of the CRP tracts will be hayed or grazed, but these are typically the best tracts that provide the most habitat," said Hicks. "Even with the restraints followed by landowners, some secondary bird nesting and fall/winter/spring nesting and hiding cover will be lost."

Early spring crow counts indicated that the pheasant population was increasing and fall numbers were looking good if the area experienced average moisture levels. However, spring and summer precipitation was well below average resulting in poor brood production. Hunters should expect to see a decrease in fall numbers of wild birds compared to previous years.

Drought and habitat conditions are also impacting pen-raised birds released from the Game and Fish's Downer Bird Farm into walk-in areas. Although production was up slightly at the facility, the drought reduced the amount of vegetation growing in the pens and many of the birds lost some of their tail feathers from increased contact with other pheasants in the enclosures.

"Released birds will not have the typical dense cover to hold them and will probably be more difficult to find," says Hicks.

The Game and Fish will continue to release birds during the Springer and Glendo permit hunts, the first seven days at Springer during the general pheasant season and at various walk-in areas and the Table Mountain Wildlife Habitat Management Area throughout the general season.

The sharp-tailed grouse season begins Sept. 23, and the Springer Special Hunt runs Oct. 19 - Nov. 3. Information on which walk-in areas will be stocked by the Game and Fish will be available later this fall.
(contact: Jeff Obrecht)

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