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Pheasant Brood Route Survey Shows Healthy Numbers

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This autumn, hunters in South Dakota will enjoy pheasant numbers that continue to be some of the best in the state's history. The 2010 brood survey count shows a small increase from the 2009 survey.

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department completed its annual pheasant brood survey in mid-August, and tallied a statewide pheasants-per-mile count that is up about 3 percent from last year.

"We had a very good year in 2009, and this peek as we go into fall tells us that hunters can look forward to some great opportunities in the coming pheasant season," said Game Fish and Parks Secretary Jeff Vonk.

The official pheasant population estimate is based on data reported by hunters during the pheasant season, and does not come until after the season is over.

In 2009, South Dakota's official pheasant population estimate was 8.4 million, and hunters averaged 9.9 roosters each for a total season harvest of more than 1.6 million. Every year from late July through mid-August, GFP personnel survey 110 established routes scattered across the state to estimate pheasant production and calculate a pheasants-per-mile index. The survey is not a population estimate, but rather

compares the number of pheasants seen on the routes and establishes trend information.

"We've had a roller coaster ride of weather conditions over the past year," Vonk said. "Pheasant numbers will be down in a few areas, but they held strong in many other areas because of excellent reproduction in parts of the state where we have good habitat conditions."

Survey routes are grouped into 13 areas, based on a local city, and the index value of each local city area is then compared to index values of the previous year and the 10-year average.

The 2010 statewide pheasants-per-mile average is 6.45, compared to the 2009 average of 6.26 and the 10-year average of 5.71.

"Our goal has been to increase quality hunting areas that are open to the public. South Dakota has worked intensely with private landowners and other conservation partners to promote habitat programs," Vonk said. "Statewide Conservation Reserve Program acres have slipped to slightly more than one million acres, but there is encouraging news. Landowner interest in the program remains high and additional acres will likely be enrolled through the recent general CRP signup."

South Dakota's regular pheasant season opens on Saturday, Oct. 16 and runs through Jan. 2.

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