



# 2025 UPLAND OUTLOOK

## SOUTH DAKOTA'S PHEASANT AND GROUSE SEASON PREVIEW

**SOUTH DAKOTA HARVESTED  
MORE ROOSTERS IN TWO  
WEEKS OF OCTOBER THAN ANY  
OTHER STATE DURING THEIR  
ENTIRE SEASON.**

**1.3 MILLION**

PHEASANTS HARVESTED IN 2024

**140,000**

PHEASANT HUNTERS IN 2024

**99,000**

GROUSE HARVESTED IN 2024

**19,000**

GROUSE HUNTERS IN 2024

### LICENSE TYPES

#### RESIDENT

Combination (small game + fishing) .....\$60  
Senior Combination (65+) .....\$43  
Small Game .....\$36  
One-Day Small Game .....\$15  
Youth Small Game (ages 12-17) .....\$5  
Mentored Small Game (youth under 16).....\$5  
Habitat Stamp.....\$10

#### NONRESIDENT

Small Game (Two five-day periods).....\$142  
Youth Small Game, ages 12-17  
(two five-day periods) .....\$10  
Mentored Small Game (youth under 16)...\$10  
Shooting Preserve (annual).....\$146  
Shooting Preserve (5-day) .....\$96  
Shooting Preserve (1-day) .....\$50  
Habitat Stamp.....\$25

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### SEASON DATES

#### PHEASANT

Youth and Mentored Only: September 27 - October 5

Resident Only: October 11 - 13

Traditional: October 18 - January 31

#### QUAIL

October 18 - January 31

#### PRAIRIE GROUSE

September 20 - January 31

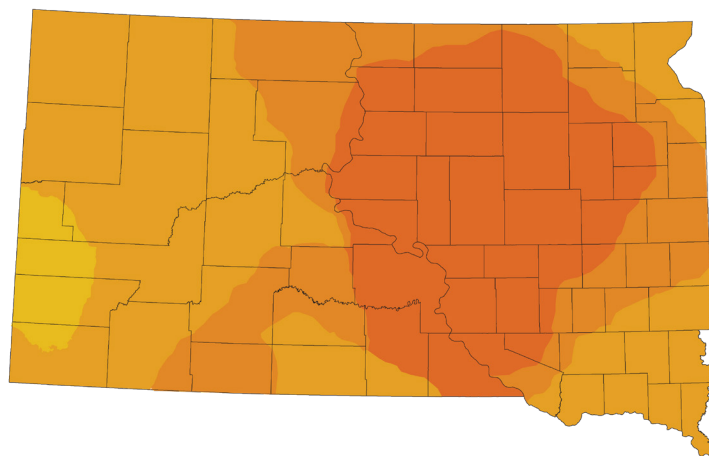
#### PARTRIDGE

September 20 - January 31



## PHEASANT DISTRIBUTION

South Dakota is home to picturesque rolling hills and endless prairie with abundant public land access to the best pheasant hunting in the country. Pheasants are most abundant in east-central South Dakota where a matrix of idle grassland, row crops, and winter-cover exists. These habitats are targeted by hunters who often harvest limits of roosters from October through January. Pheasants and pheasant hunting are iconic to South Dakota, bringing a tradition of enthusiasm and excitement of the “flush” to communities throughout the state.

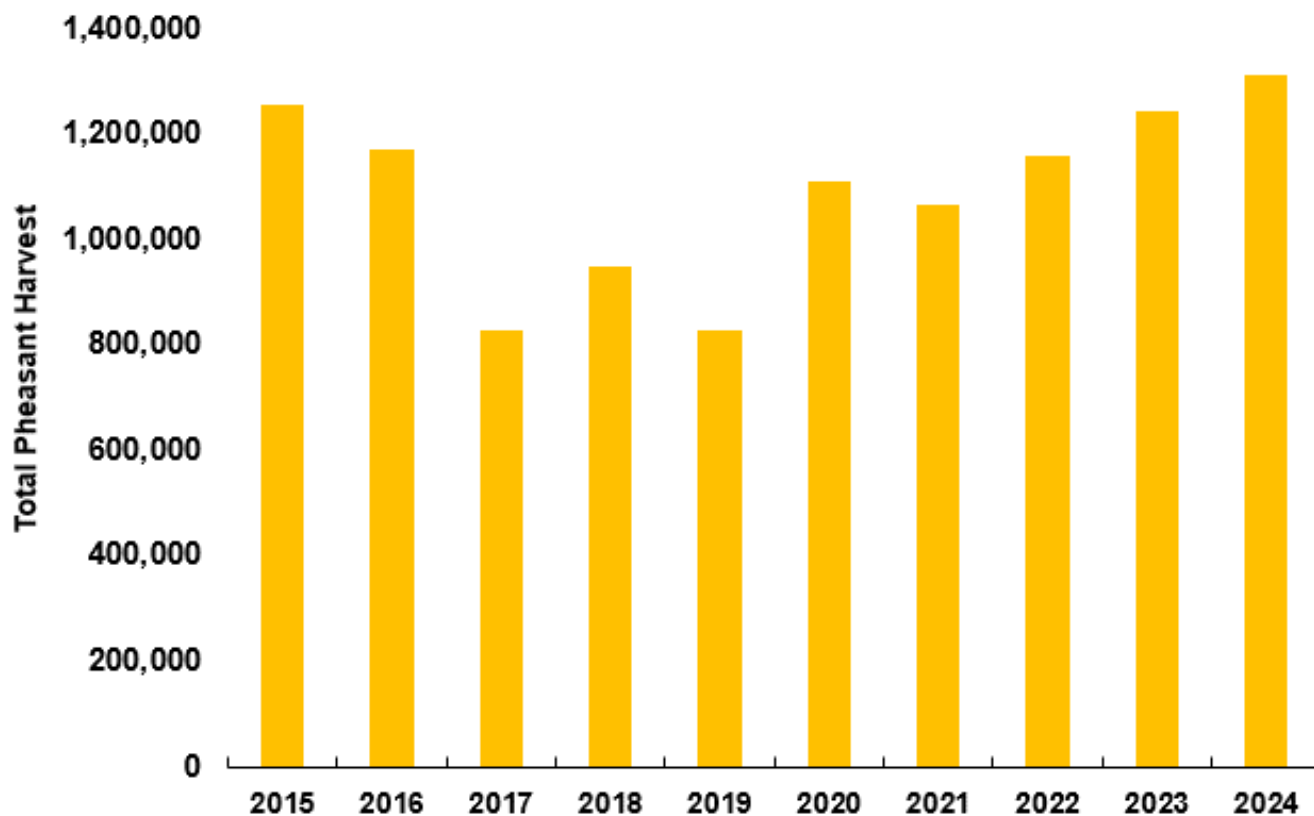


## PHEASANT HARVEST

One-hundred and forty thousand hunters from around the globe harvested over 1.3 million pheasants in 2024, the most in the past decade. More roosters were harvested in two weeks of October than any other state during their entire season. In addition, **hunters averaged over 9 birds per hunter for the season**, which was the highest since 2011. The 2024 pheasant season was a spectacular one!

Like other upland game birds, such as prairie grouse, pheasants are short lived with low annual survival and high reproductive potential. Young of the year birds make up most of the annual harvest when conditions are good for reproduction.

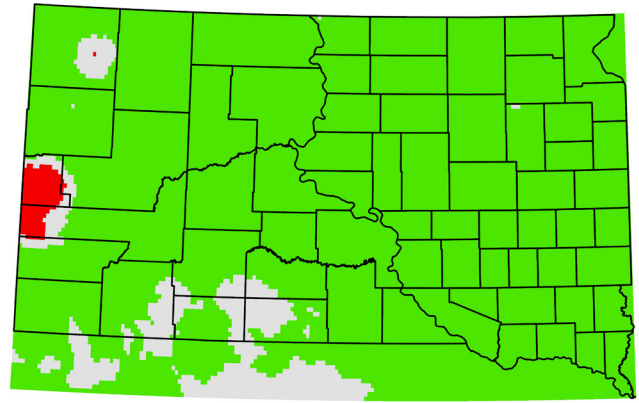
### PHEASANT HARVEST IN SOUTH DAKOTA, 2015-2024



## WEATHER CONDITIONS FOR PHEASANTS

Historical data has provided insight on how weather conditions play a role in determining pheasant reproduction from one year to the next. Three weather variables effect production: snowfall, spring temperature, and spring rainfall prior to the nesting season. Snow accumulation reduces overwinter survival, while temperature and moisture influence nest initiation timing and the condition of available nesting cover. Below average snowfall and mild spring conditions prior to nest initiation yield the best response in pheasant production.

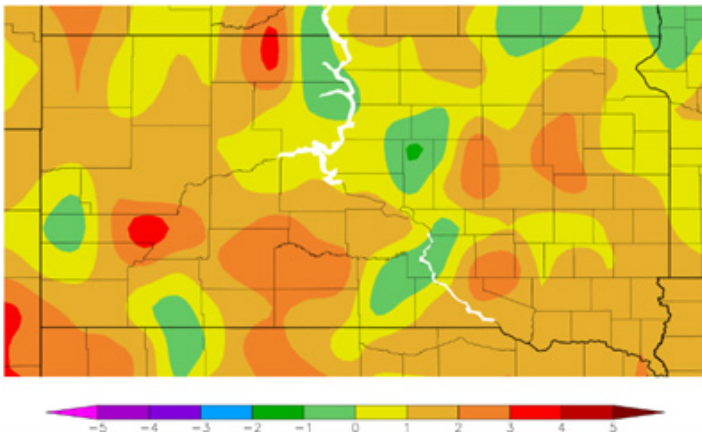
The extraordinary 2024-25 pheasant hunting season was a direct result of a mild winter followed by excellent spring and summer weather within the primary pheasant range. Reduced snowfall last year should result in high over-winter survival and an abundance of hen pheasants available for nesting.



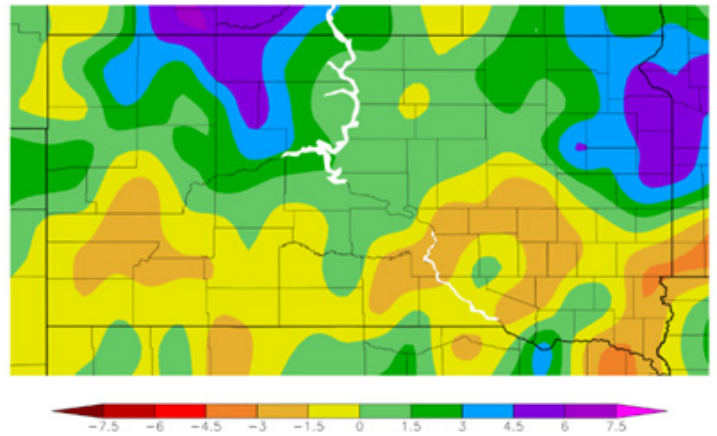
South Dakota snowfall totals (in) from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025. Green areas represent below average cumulative snowfall, grey areas represent average cumulative snowfall, and red areas represent above average cumulative snowfall.

Adequate spring precipitation and near normal temperatures, followed by timely summer rainfall has made grassland habitat conditions favorable for production once again. Although severe weather affects reproduction, negative effects are generally localized on the landscape. As always, it is best to contact landowners or wildlife professionals to learn of any localized severe weather impacts.

Departure from Normal Temperature (F)  
4/1/2025 – 6/30/2025



Departure from Normal Precipitation (in)  
4/1/2025 – 6/30/2025



## PHEASANT SEASON OUTLOOK

The 2025 pheasant hunting outlook is expected to be much like last year, with good pheasant production and quality habitat conditions for hunters to target. Grassland conditions were excellent for nesting and brood rearing across most of the pheasant range.

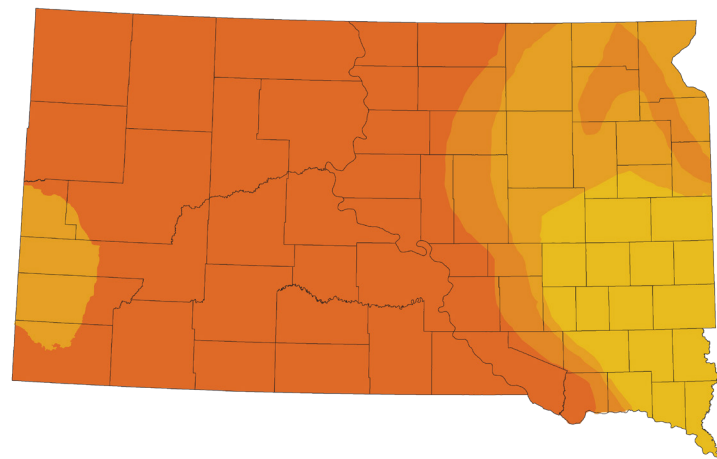
Pheasant populations, along with all wildlife populations, respond positively to abundant habitat, especially habitat provided by the Conservation Reserve Program and other grassland habitat. Establishing more habitat and providing

additional acres of public hunting access is priority #1 for GFP. Conservation partners are hard at work with GFP creating and supporting programs and initiatives at both the state and federal levels with private landowners to provide pheasant habitat and hunting access. Among the highest priorities are enrolling the James River Watershed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to the fully allocated 100,000 acres and enrolling 25,000 acres in a new Big Sioux Watershed CREP. For more information on these public areas visit [gfp.sd.gov/hunting-areas](https://gfp.sd.gov/hunting-areas) to begin planning your fall hunting trip.

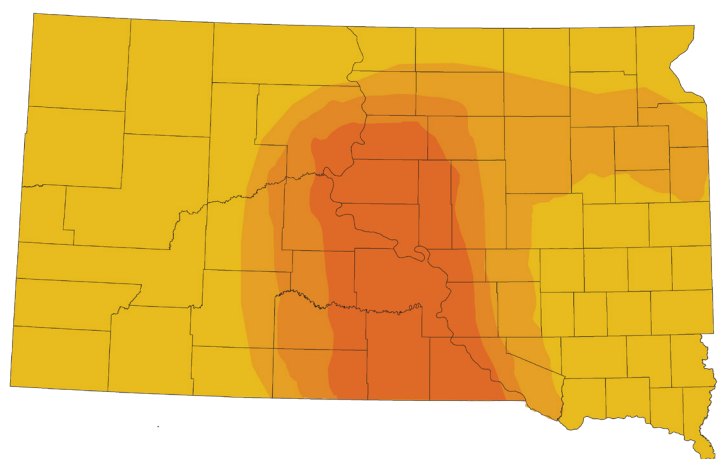
# PRAIRIE GROUSE DISTRIBUTION

Greater prairie-chicken and sharp-tailed grouse, commonly referred to as prairie grouse, offer a unique and popular hunting opportunity in South Dakota. Prairie grouse are most abundant in central and western South Dakota where ample grassland habitat exists. In addition to large blocks of grassland, prairie grouse also frequent cropland and shrubs. These habitats are targeted by hunters who often harvest mixed bags of sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie-chickens in the central portion of the state, where there ranges overlap.

## SHARP-TAILED GROUSE DISTRIBUTION



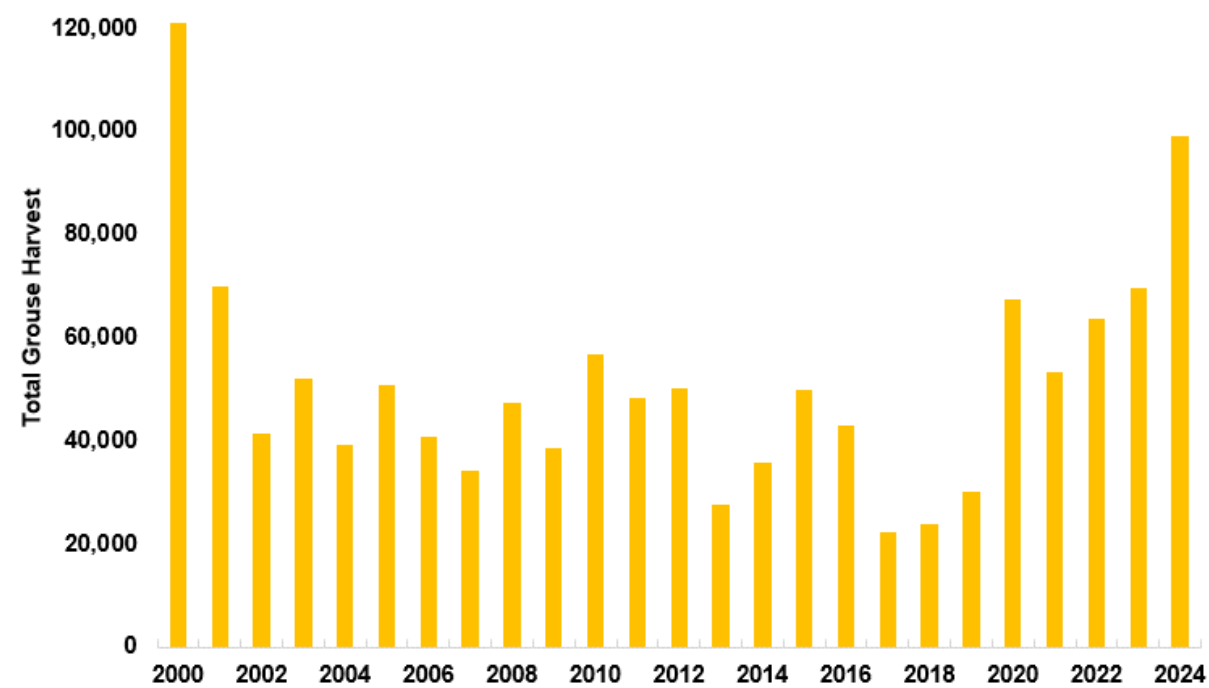
## PRAIRIE CHICKEN DISTRIBUTION



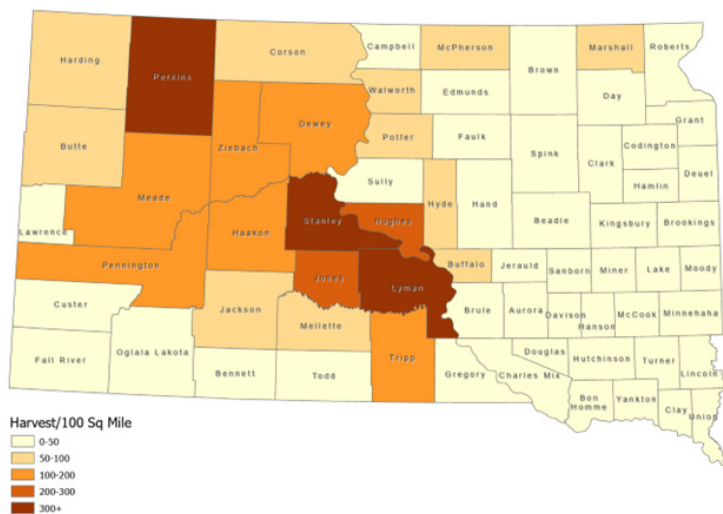
# PRAIRIE GROUSE HARVEST

Prairie grouse harvest increased in 2024 to the highest recorded in a quarter century. Overall, nearly 19,000 hunters harvested an estimated almost 99,000 prairie grouse. Most of the prairie grouse harvest in 2024 occurred in central and western portions of the state.

## PRAIRIE GROUSE HARVEST IN SOUTH DAKOTA, 2000-2024



## PRAIRIE GROUSE REPRODUCTION



*Distribution of 2024 prairie grouse harvest (harvest/100 mi<sup>2</sup>) in South Dakota*

grouse are collected each year to determine what proportion of the harvest consisted of young of the year birds. On average, 2 young of the year birds are harvested for every 1 adult, but the ratio of young to adult birds has been as high as 3.05 in 2004 and as low as 0.61 in 2002. This data provides biologists with valuable information about reproductive success each year. It is well known that environmental variables can impact reproductive success in upland game birds. Last year, the ratio of young to adult birds was 1.7, slightly lower than 2023 but comparable to the 10-year average.

## PRAIRIE GROUSE HABITAT CONDITIONS

Last year, a phenomenal prairie grouse hunting season was a direct result of an easy winter partnered excellent grassland conditions in most of the prairie grouse range. Another mild winter occurred in South Dakota last year resulting in high over-winter survival and record lek counts. Timely spring rains and summer moisture have made grassland conditions favorable for production once again.

We expect the current favorable range conditions to contribute to good prairie grouse production once again, resulting in increased hunter success. A vast majority of the primary prairie grouse range is drought free to abnormally dry in 2025. Because drought and prairie grouse production are negatively correlated with one another, lack of drought and current habitat conditions are expected to yield excellent nesting/brood success.

Spring prairie grouse populations are monitored annually by counting males on leks, often referred to as dancing or booming grounds. Surveys occur in portions of central South Dakota that overlap areas of high hunter effort. Counts of males on these traditional breeding season display areas provide a local population index of the adult population. Young of the year birds play a major role in the fall population, which for this reason, spring lek counts are not necessarily a good predictor of fall population levels or hunter success. They are a good indicator of long-term trend data for the adult population. Lek surveys conducted in central South Dakota by GFP and U.S. Forest Service staff indicated record high numbers of greater prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse in 2025.

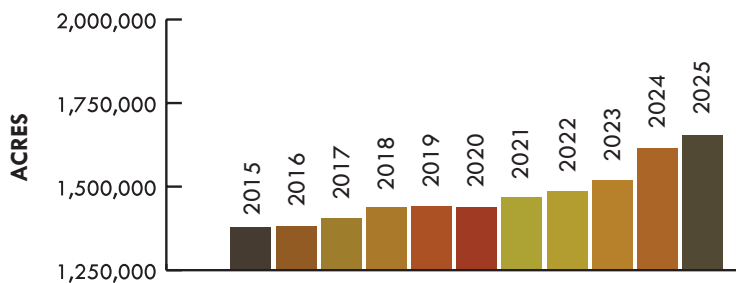
Prairie grouse reproductive success is not easily determined before the hunting season. However, wings from hunter harvested prairie

## PRAIRIE GROUSE OUTLOOK

The 2025 prairie grouse hunting outlook is expected to be much like 2024 season with good prairie grouse production and quality habitat conditions for holding cover while hunting. An easy winter with high survival, partnered with good weather during spring and summer has created excellent grassland and subsequent nesting and brood rearing conditions in a majority of central and western South Dakota. We expect the current favorable range conditions to contribute to an increased in hunter success.

Hunters are encouraged to visit with landowners and public in their traditional hunting areas as local population levels and habitat conditions can vary. There are over 1.6 million acres available for public hunting, of which 1.25 million acres is in the Walk In Area program and an excellent starting point for planning your hunt. Many of these acres are located in the heart of prairie grouse range. Hunters who harvest prairie grouse are encouraged to provide a wing from each bird which will be used to estimate reproductive success and refine future prairie grouse outlooks.

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