OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

2023 Pheasant Season Update

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Spring rains help give 2023 pheasant numbers a bump.

Ring-neck pheasants remain a popular upland game species among Oklahoma hunters. The ODWC monitors the pheasant population through two surveys: spring crow counts (Figure 2) and summer brood surveys (Figure 3). With low observation numbers these roadside surveys can have a wide degree of variability, but the consistency of the survey methodology over time allows us to interpret the information on a historical scale. The data collected provides an index of the spring breeding population (crow counts) and recruitment success for that year (brood surveys). Traditionally Alfalfa, Beaver, Cimarron, Grant, and Texas Counties have held the highest pheasant numbers. These 5 counties have had spring crow surveys since 1973, and brood surveys since 1980. In 1998, the surveys were expanded to 13 counties to include Ellis, Garfield, Harper, Kay, Major, Noble, Woods, and Woodward (Figure 1).

The spring 2023 crow count survey showed a lower number of calls heard per point than in 2022 (Figure 2). Weather patterns shifted to being more El Niño driven allowing for more rain through the late spring and early summer. Looking at the numbers from 1973 to 2023 there is an overall positive trend in the number of calls heard during the spring crow call count surveys, however index numbers for both crow and brood surveys remain well below the long-term average. The August brood surveys have shown a slow steady increase over the last 4 years in both the traditional counties and the statewide average (Figure 3). The 5 traditional counties were up from 0.01 broods/route in 2022 to 0.015 in 2023. The total number of pheasants observed was also slightly up from 27 in 2022 to 30 in 2023.

The past year has generally been a great improvement over the previous couple of years. November of 2022 had over 97% of the state in D2-D4 drought conditions (Figure 4). Last year's drought conditions and overall a La Niña weather pattern gave way to a moist spring fueled by a return of El Niño conditions. Spring brought some reprieve for most of the state from drought, but some of those storms and systems brought large swaths of hail that can make nesting success limited locally. Now in mid-October, pockets of extreme drought persist in the northcentral and southern regions of the state. Without additional rains drought conditions will worsen for much of the state. (Figures 11-13). Drought settled back in with the summer heat setting in quickly with areas in the southwest seeing up to 59 days over 100°F. Intermittent rains allowed for much of the state to see decent crops of forbs and insects. Currently, we see about 33.9% of the state in at least Severe (D2) Drought (Figure 4)

Pheasant hunters this season will likely find pockets of fair pheasant numbers in areas where habitat and conditions are most favorable, insects are plentiful, forbs are abundant, and drought has not made a severe impact.

2023 Pheasant Season information

Pheasant season opens on December 1st, 2023 and runs through January 31st, 2024.

Hunters are allowed to harvest two cock pheasant daily.

Open areas include Alfalfa, Beaver, Cimarron, Garfield, Grant, Harper, Kay, Major, Noble, Osage, Texas, Woods, and Woodward counties; and the portions of Blaine, Dewey, Ellis, Kingfisher, and Logan counties north of State Highway 51.

Seasons on public lands may vary from the statewide season.
For more regulations and other information consult the Oklahoma Hunting and Fishing Guide online at https://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/regs or in print wherever hunting and fishing licenses are sold.

Ultimately, remember the outdoors are always open!
Work some ground, trust your dog, and make a memory!
Enjoying the Oklahoma Outdoors!

Figure 1: Traditional and Non-traditional Pheasant Survey areas

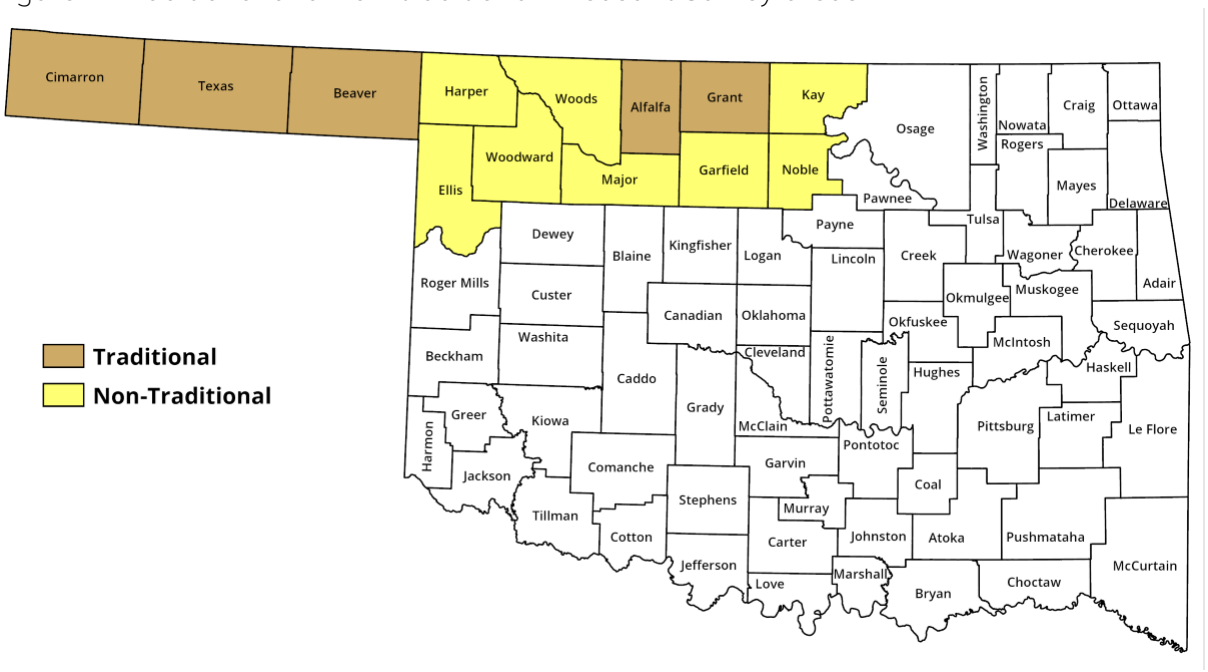

Figure 2: Pheasant crows heard per point

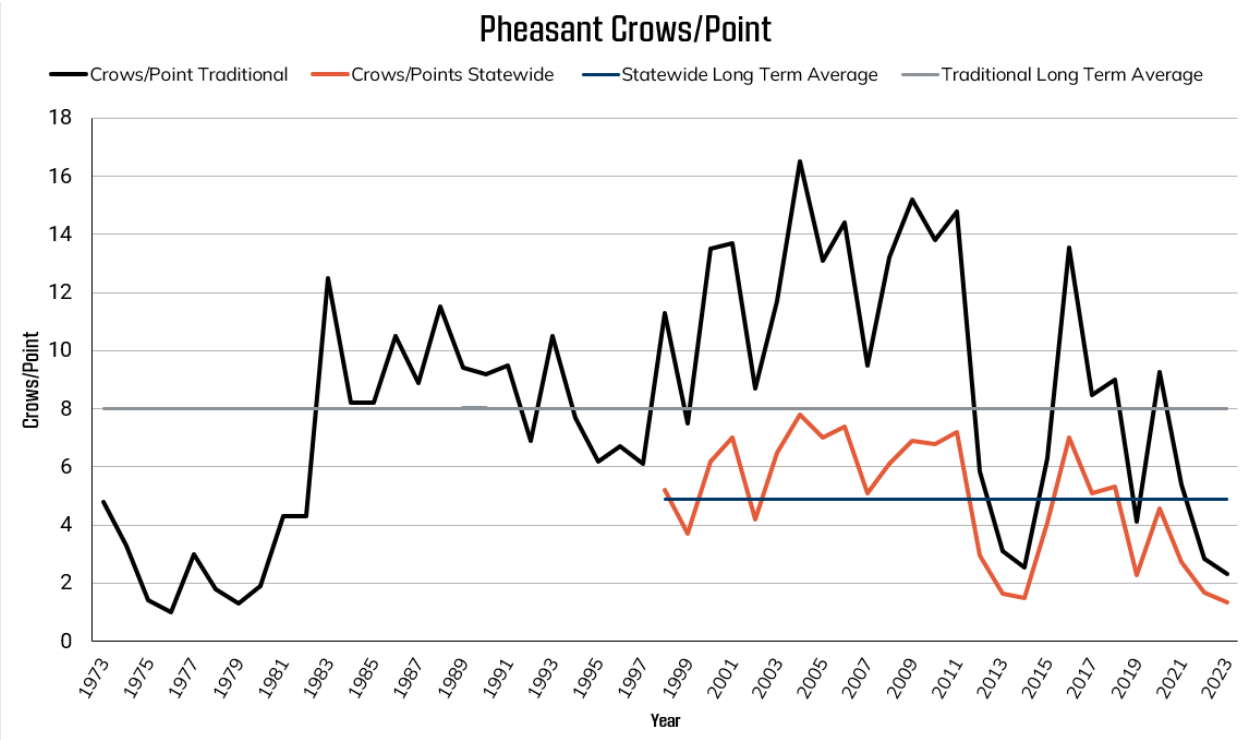

Figure 3: Pheasant broods observed per 20-mile route

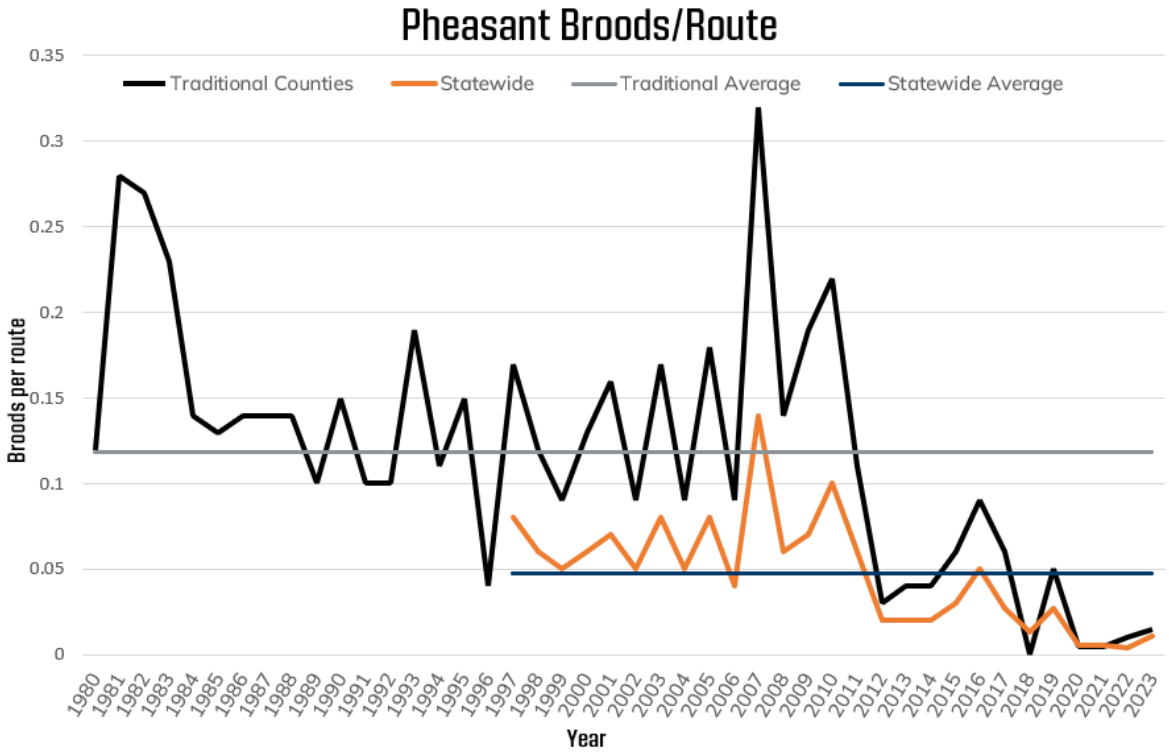

Figure 4: Oklahoma Drought Monitor Comparison (Source: droughtmonitor.unl.edu/)

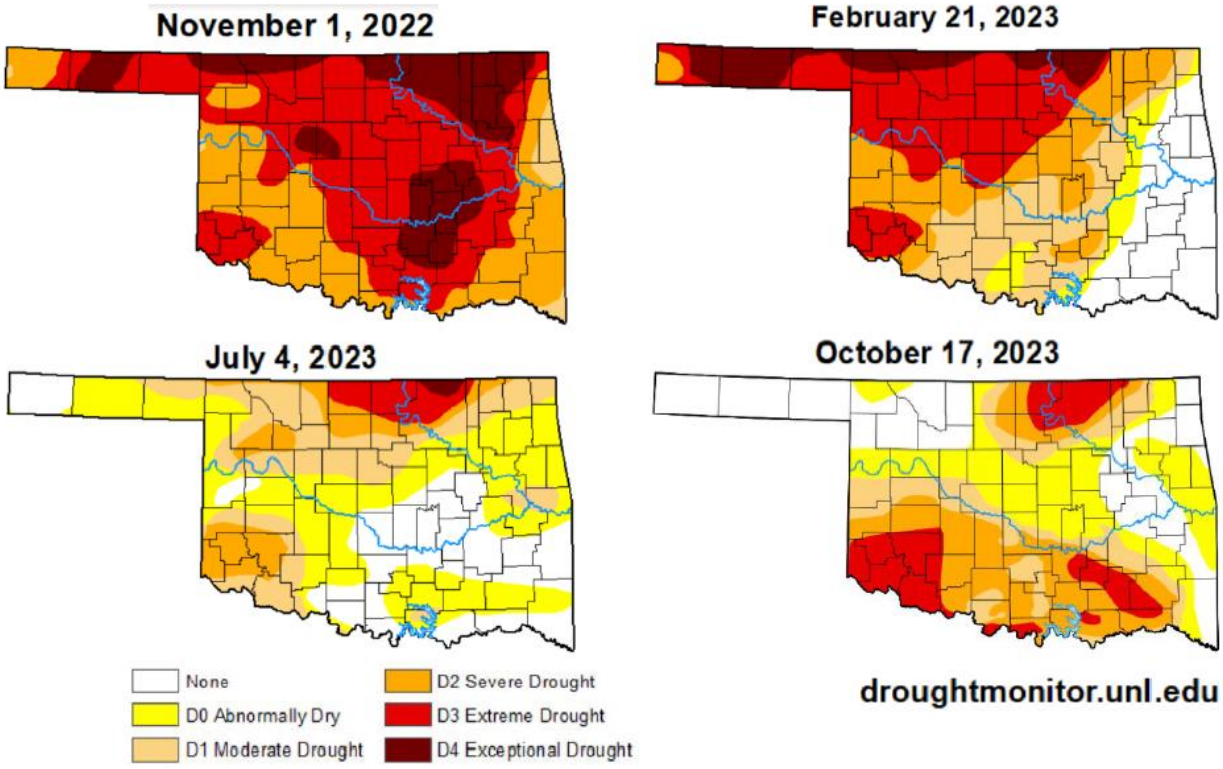

Figure 5: Departure from normal rainfall April 21, 2023 through October 17, 2023 (Source: climate.ok.gov)