



OKLAHOMA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
**WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION**

## **2024 Pheasant Season Update**

**Tell Judkins, Upland Game Biologist**  
**October 30, 2024**

*2024 pheasant numbers up; yet below long-term averages*  
*Dry conditions could make for tough hunting*

Ring-neck pheasants remain a popular upland game species among Oklahoma hunters. The ODWC monitors the pheasant population through two surveys: spring crow counts and summer brood surveys. 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 2024 crow count survey showed an increase in number of calls heard per point over 2023 (Figure 2). Weather patterns throughout the spring and early summer were driven by El Niño allowing for more precipitation. Looking at the numbers from 1973 to 2024 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 averages (Figure 3). The 5 traditional counties were up from 0.015 broods/route in 2023 to 0.05 in 2024. The total number of pheasants observed was also up from 30 in 2023 to 68 in 2024.

The past year has seen the ups and downs that define Oklahoma's weather. Last year's season kicked off with 57% of the state in some level of drought which improved steadily through February (Figure 4). As the year continued, El Niño weather patterns brought timely rains that led to excellent conditions for nesting and brood rearing. By July, drought had begun to intensify across the state as the weather shifted to a more neutral pattern and ultimately transitioned to La Niña, which drives drier and warmer weather. By mid-October over 50% of the state is now in Severe or Extreme Drought conditions (Figure 5). Current climate models forecast a shift back to those more favorable El Niño patterns by early next spring which could greatly benefit species like pheasant across their range in the state.

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 recent drought has not made a severe impact.

## 2024 Pheasant Season information

Pheasant season opens on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 and runs through January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025.

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. With the new 2024 license changes, people who access properties enrolled in the OLAP Program will need to purchase a Land Access Permit. For more detailed 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

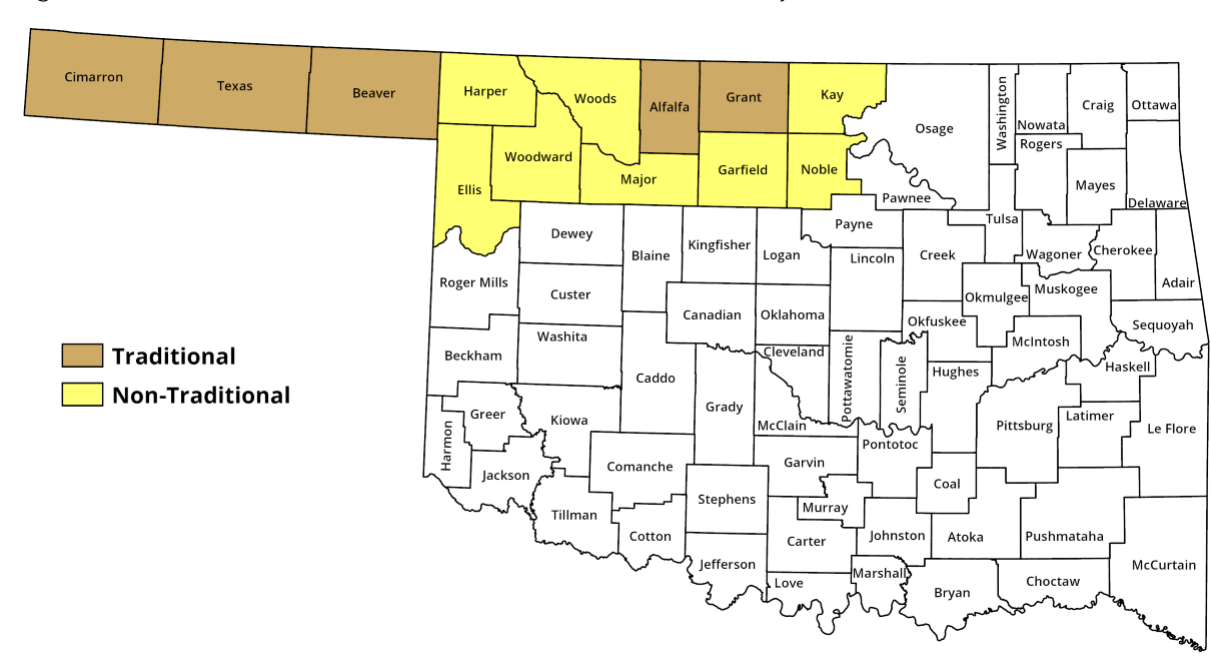


Figure 2: Pheasant crows heard per point (1998 – 2024)

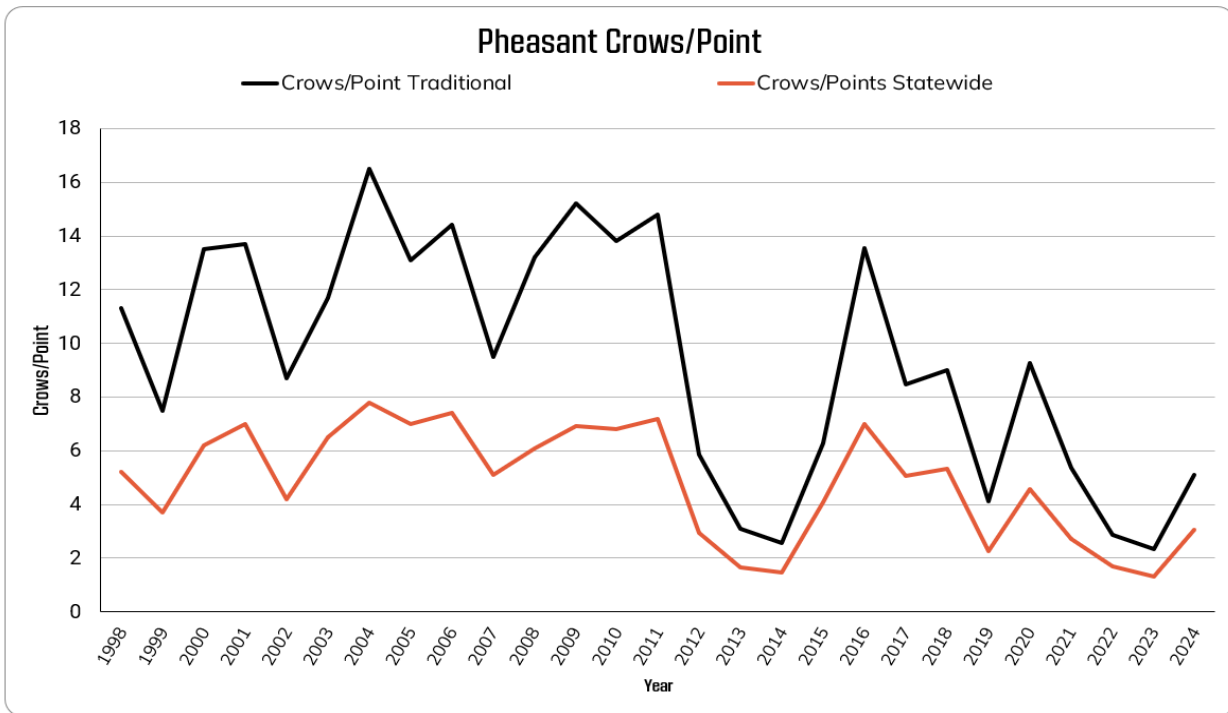


Figure 3: Pheasant broods observed per 20-mile route (1998 – 2024)

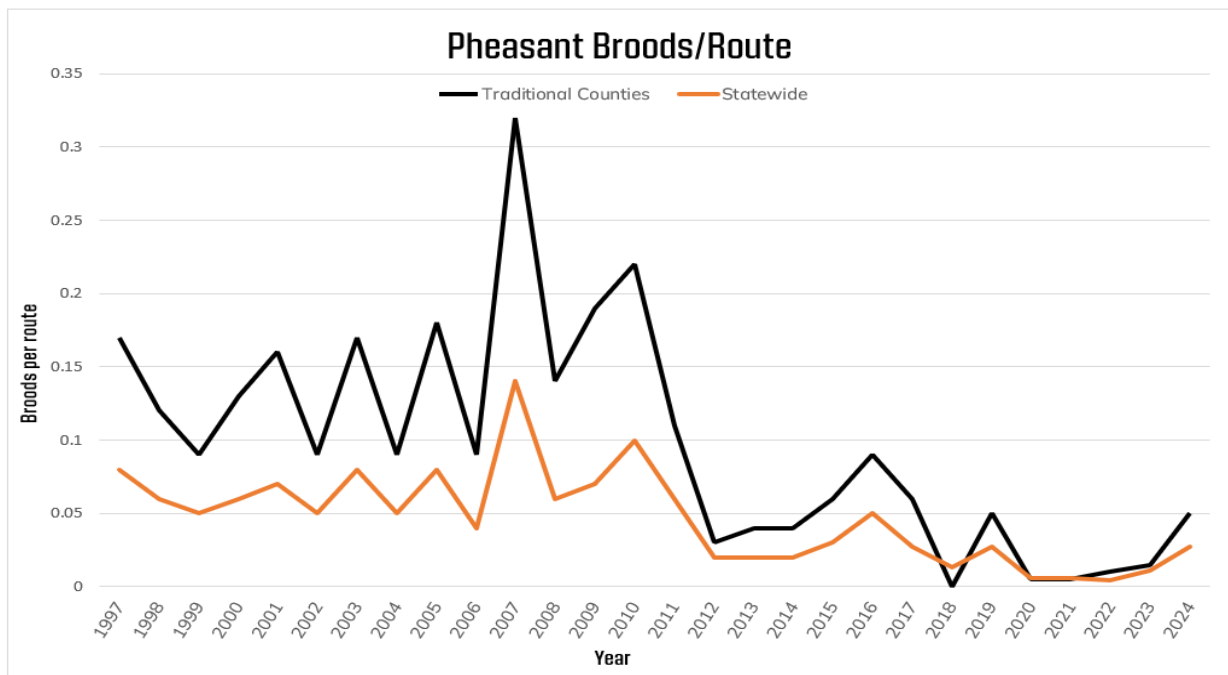


Figure 4: Oklahoma Drought Monitor Comparison (Source: droughtmonitor.unl.edu/)

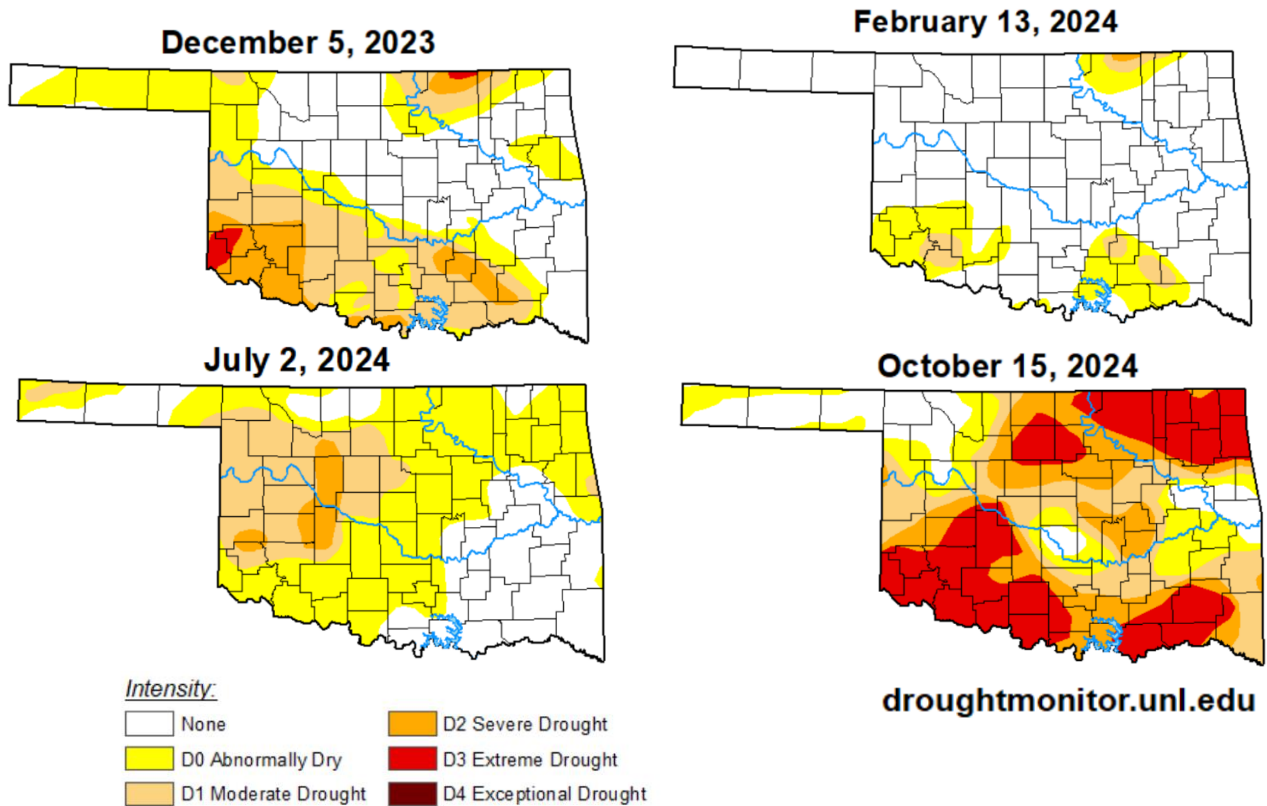


Figure 5: Departure from normal rainfall June 24, 2024 through October 21, 2024 (Source: climate.ok.gov)

