



2024 Quail Season Update

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*2024 marks 4 consecutive years of Bobwhite Index Growth
48% boost to Oklahoma's October surveys; yet below long-term averages.*

Over thirty years ago the ODWC began conducting roadside surveys to monitor quail numbers throughout the state. There are 81 twenty-mile routes surveyed in August and October in all counties except Oklahoma and Tulsa counties which are excluded due to urbanization. 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. August surveys give biologists an idea of breeding success, while October surveys reveal a glimpse of recruitment for the fall hunting season. Typically, August survey numbers are a less reliable hunting season predictor than October's due to the fact that some chicks will not survive through the summer. Long term and year-to-year trends are important for sportsmen and biologists alike. The last decade has seen survey numbers cycle starting at the lowest recorded on these surveys in 2012 and slowly rising to a peak in 2016 that quickly fell back to previous lows. The data are analyzed in two ways: by region (Figure 1/Table 1) and by ecoregion (Figure 2/Table 2). Looking at the data by both groupings can help us better understand the fluctuations in quail numbers. This year we are seeing the statewide average up by about 48% over 2023.

The August surveys showed all regions except the southeast region up over 2023. October's surveys showed all regions up except for the southcentral and northeast regions. (Table 1). Figures 4-10 below show the average survey results for each region for 1990-2024. In these figures I have added a rolling 10-year average to help visualize the changes and relationship to the 10-year average over longer periods. While the numbers aren't up as high as were reported in August; 2024 marks 4 consecutive years of increases to our statewide quail index.

When we break the statewide numbers down by ecoregion, we are able to see what areas are producing better or worse year-to-year (Table 2 & Figure 3). Several ecoregions saw substantial increases in 2024. By analyzing the data this way, we can also see that there are primarily four ecoregions driving this year's statewide average: Arkansas Valleys and Ridges, Rolling Red Prairie, Rolling Red Plain, and the Southern High Plain.

The past year has seen the ups and downs that define Oklahoma's weather. Last year's season kicked off with 50% of the state in some level of drought which improved steadily through February (Figure 13). As the year continued, El Niño weather patterns brought timely rains that led to excellent conditions for early season nesting. By July, drought had begun to intensify across the state as the weather shifted to a more neutral pattern and ultimately transitioning to La Niña, which drives drier and warmer weather.

Portions of the state saw up to 53 days above 100°F. By mid-October over 50% of the state is now in Severe or Extreme Drought conditions (Figures 11-13). Current climate models forecast a shift back to those more favorable El Niño patterns by early next spring which could greatly benefit quail across the state.

Anecdotal reports of broods seem to show that quail nesting season started in early June, with a majority of observations coming in mid-July. Brood reports have continued throughout the nesting season, but reports of recent hatches have slowed as drought has increased. Age structure of observed bobwhite in the October surveys show 90.4% full grown and 9.6% ¾ grown birds. This structure tends to relate with a strong early hatch.

No scaled quail were observed during the 2024 surveys. There are only a few routes in Oklahoma with the opportunity to observe scaled quail. Therefore, this is not a prediction of scaled quail abundance, strictly an observation. ODWC biologists have received several reports of scaled quail broods in the Oklahoma panhandle in 2024.

This year ODWC is once again collecting wings from public lands to better evaluate our quail population. If you harvest a bird from a Wildlife Management Area with a wing box, please take the time to place one wing into a provided envelope from each harvested quail (whichever is least damaged as long as only one wing per bird), fill out the envelope, and then place it in the box. The management areas that will have boxes are Beaver River, Canton, Cooper, Cross Timbers, Ellis County, Kaw, Packsaddle, Pushmataha, Sand Hills, and Sandy Sanders. Your participation in this data collection effort provides vital information about nesting success and timing and helps improve the management of these game birds.

In summary, hunters taking to the field will likely find areas of good quail numbers where habitat and weather conditions were most favorable. Hunting will not be what it was at the last observed production peak in 2016, but we expect hunters to find birds throughout the state. Quail season opens November 9th, 2024 and runs until February 15th, 2025. Hunters are allowed 10 quail daily. 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 dogs, and make a memory!

Enjoying the Oklahoma Outdoors!

Figure 1. Regional Map of Oklahoma.

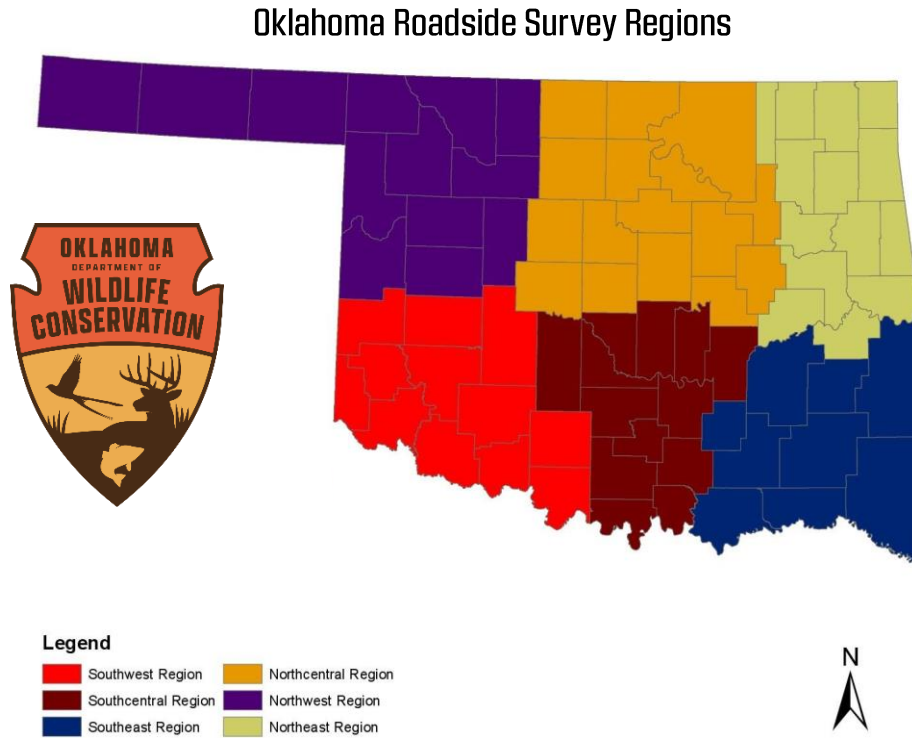


Table 1. Regional Breakdown of Surveys

Region	August			October		
	2023	2024		2023	2024	
Northwest	4.88	13.31	↑	6.13	7.25	↑
Northeast	3.5	4.71	↑	0.93	0.6	↓
Southwest	2.67	13.42	↑	1.17	5.67	↑
Southeast	0.45	0.18	↓	0.91	1	↑
Northcentral	1.06	4.13	↑	0.73	1.07	↑
Southcentral	0.08	1.85	↑	0.08	0	↓
Statewide	2.23	6.52	↑	1.82	2.7	↑

Figure 2. Ecoregion Map of Oklahoma.

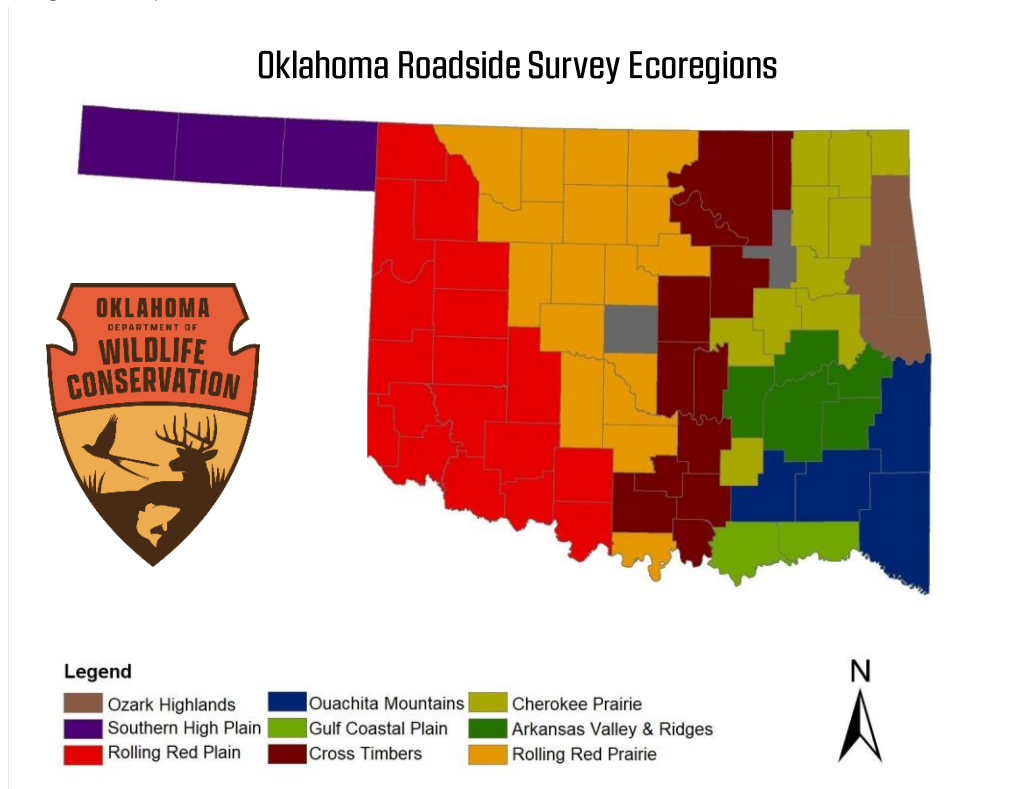


Table 2: Ecoregional Breakdown of Surveys

Ecoregion	August			October		
	2023	2024		2023	2024	
Arkansas Valley & Ridges	0	3.83	↑	0	3.00	↑
Cherokee Prairie	3.7	4.4	↑	1.50	0	↓
Cross Timbers	1.15	0.85	↓	0.54	0	↓
Ozark Highlands	0	0	-	0	0.25	↑
Gulf Coastal Plain	0	0	-	0	0	-
Ouachita Mountains	1	0.4	↓	1.60	0	↓
Rolling Red Prairie	1.71	6.06	↑	0.41	3.06	↑
Rolling Red Plain	4	14.8	↑	3.85	6.20	↑
Southern High Plain	3.75	12.25	↑	8.25	6.00	↓
Statewide	2.23	6.52	↑	1.81	2.70	↑

Figure 3: Quail/Route by ecoregion from 2016-2024

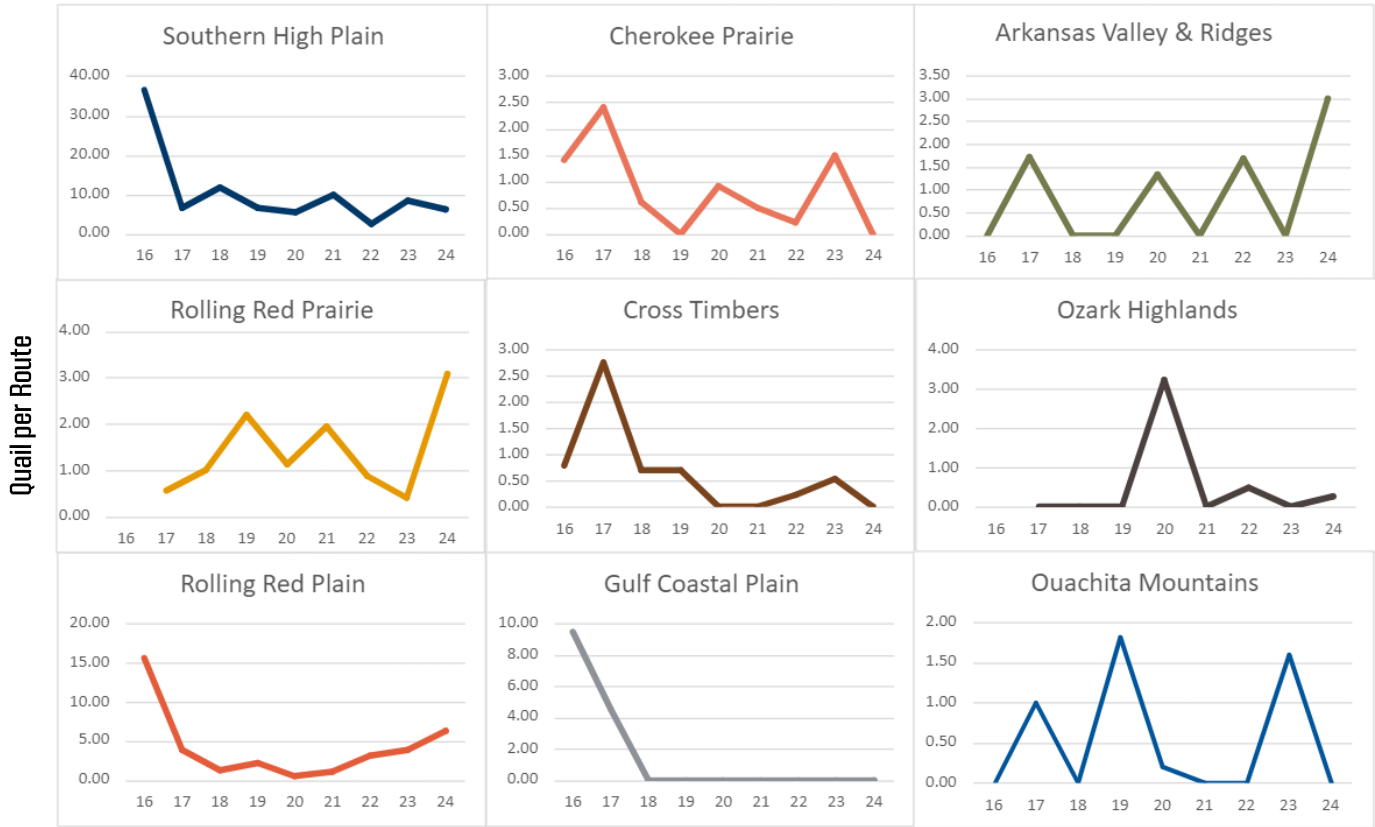


Figure 4: Statewide Long Term Averages

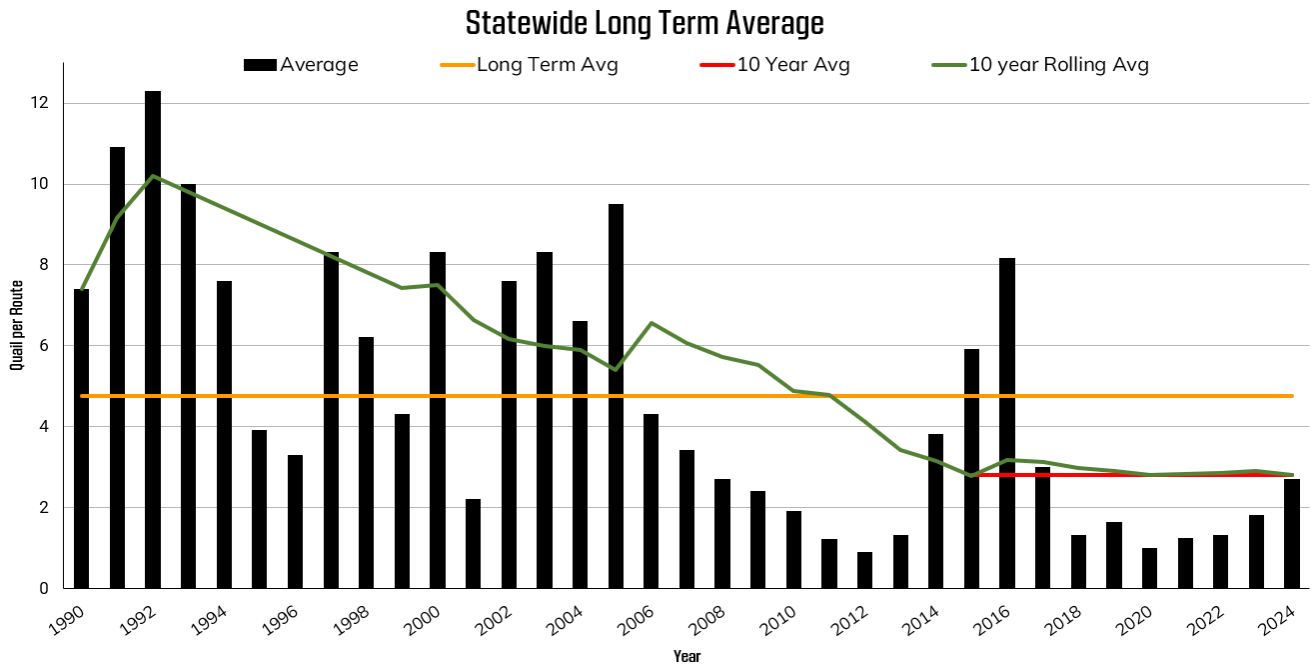


Figure 5: Northwest Long Term Averages

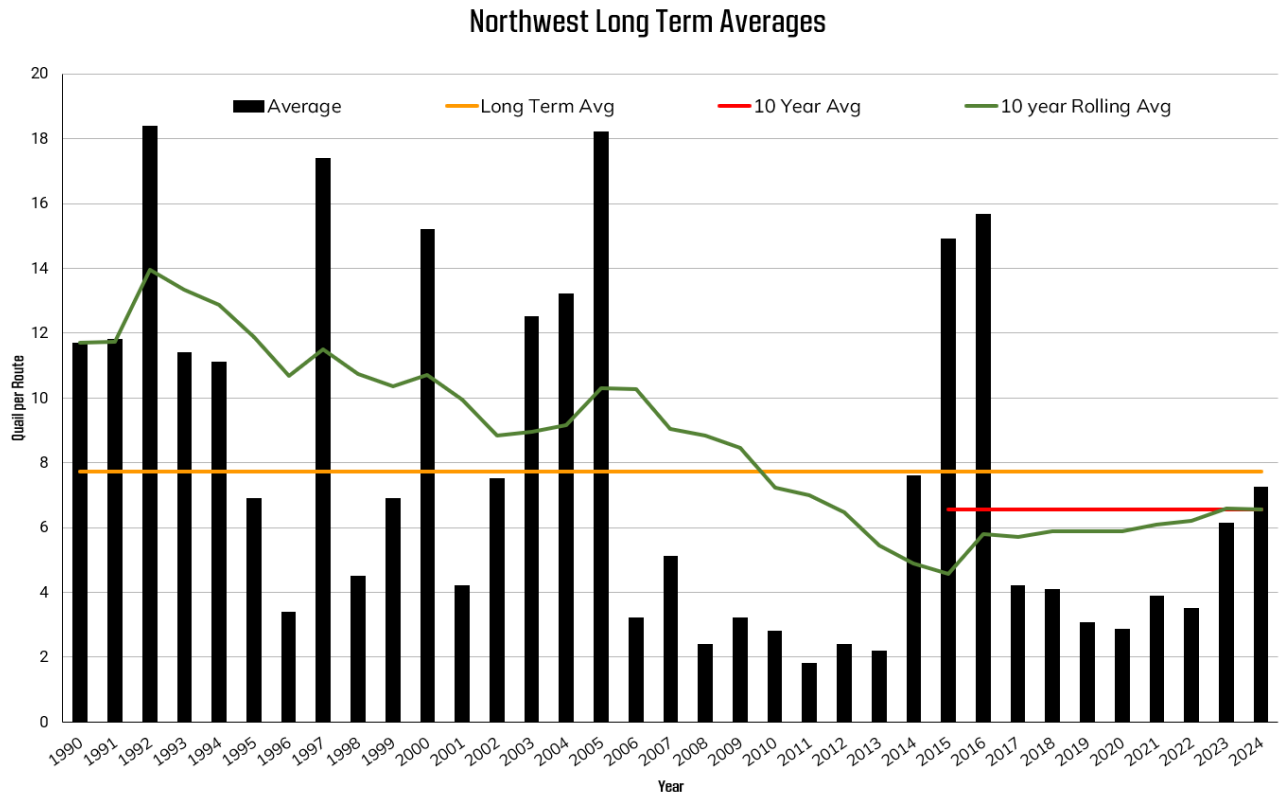


Figure 6: Southwest Long Term Average

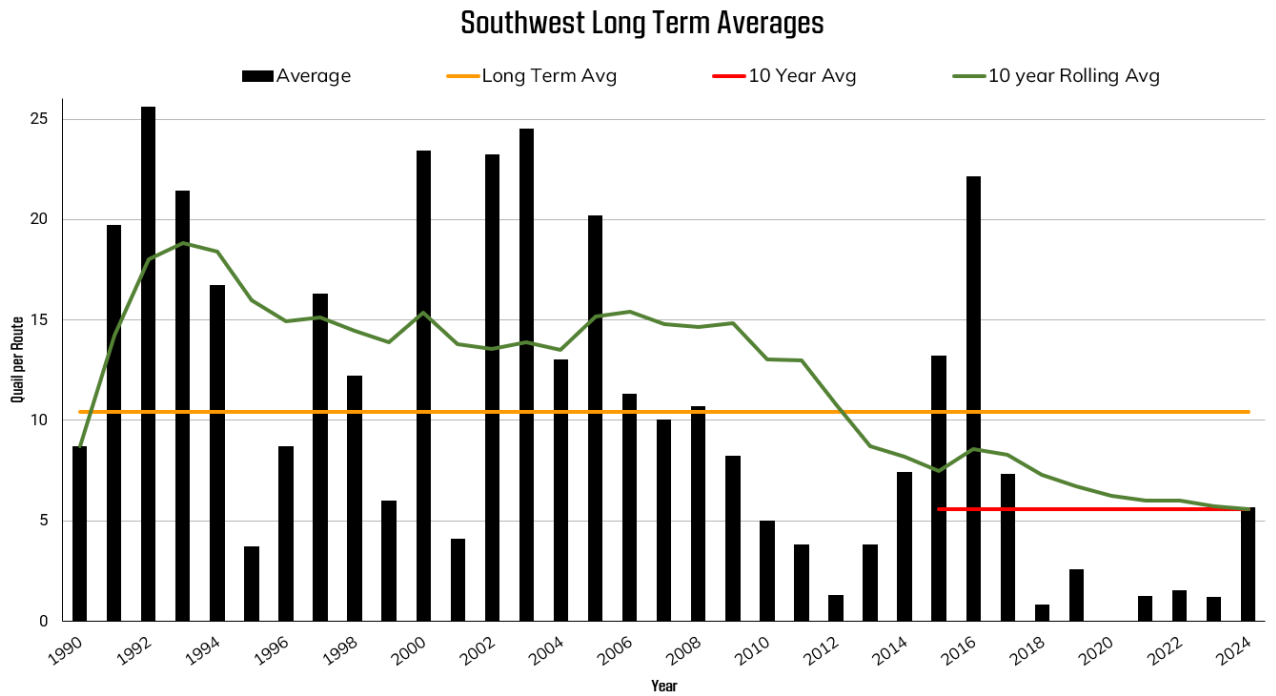


Figure 7: Northcentral Long Term Average

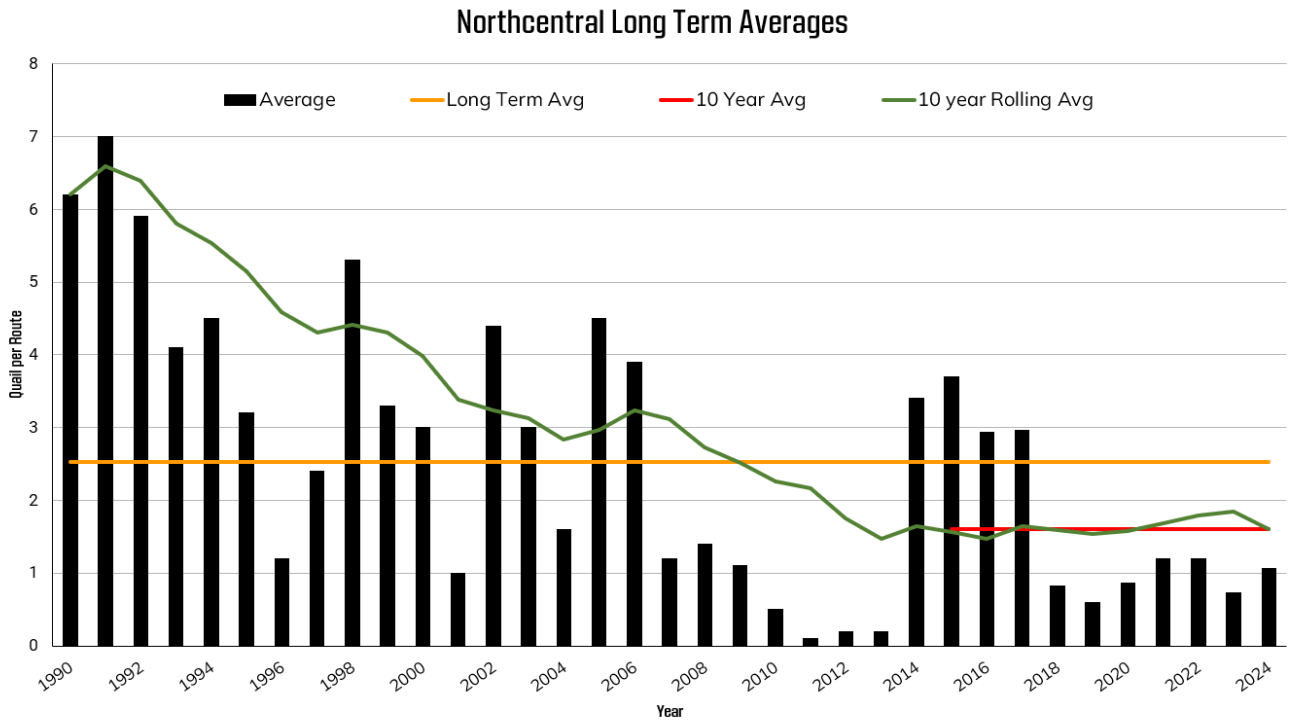


Figure 8: Southcentral Long Term Average

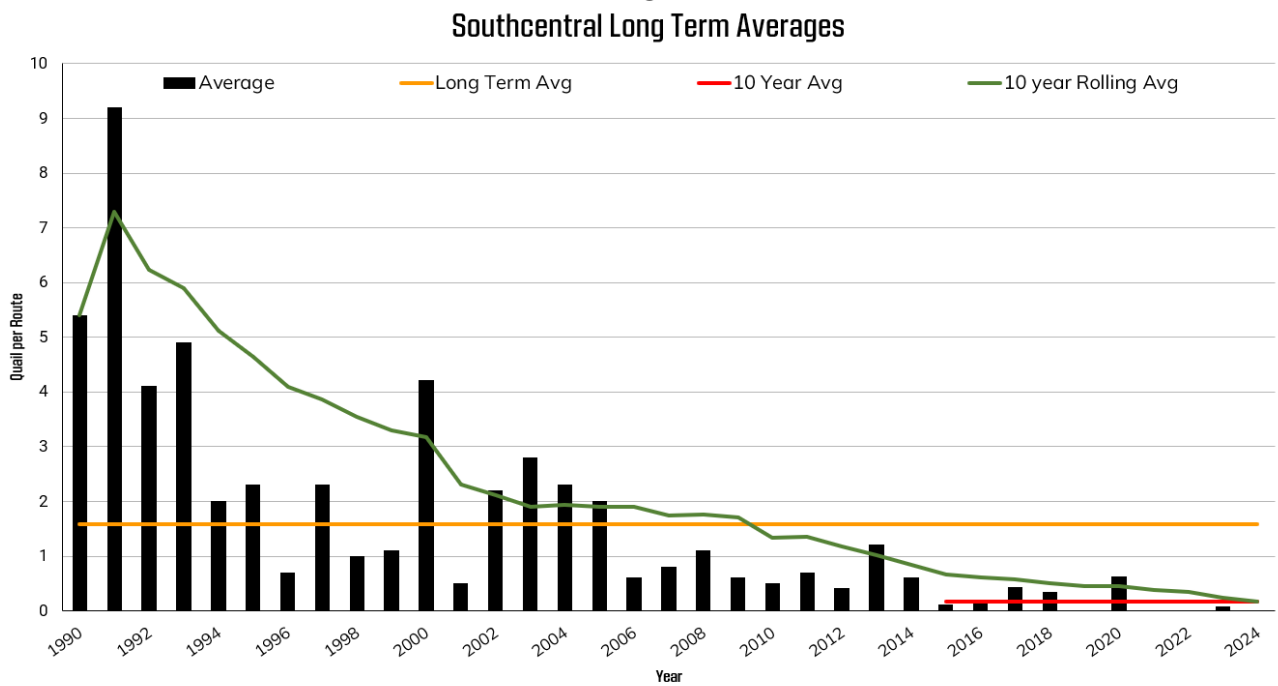


Figure 9: Northeast Long Term Average

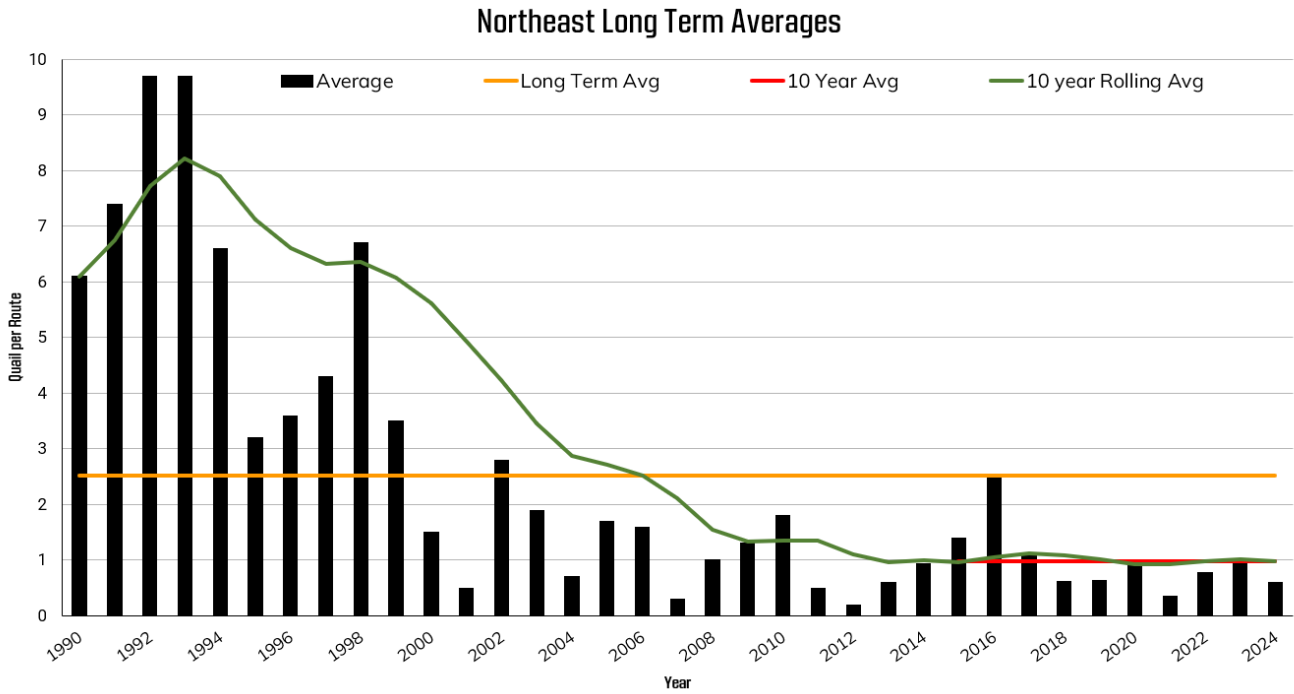


Figure 10: Southeast Long Term Average

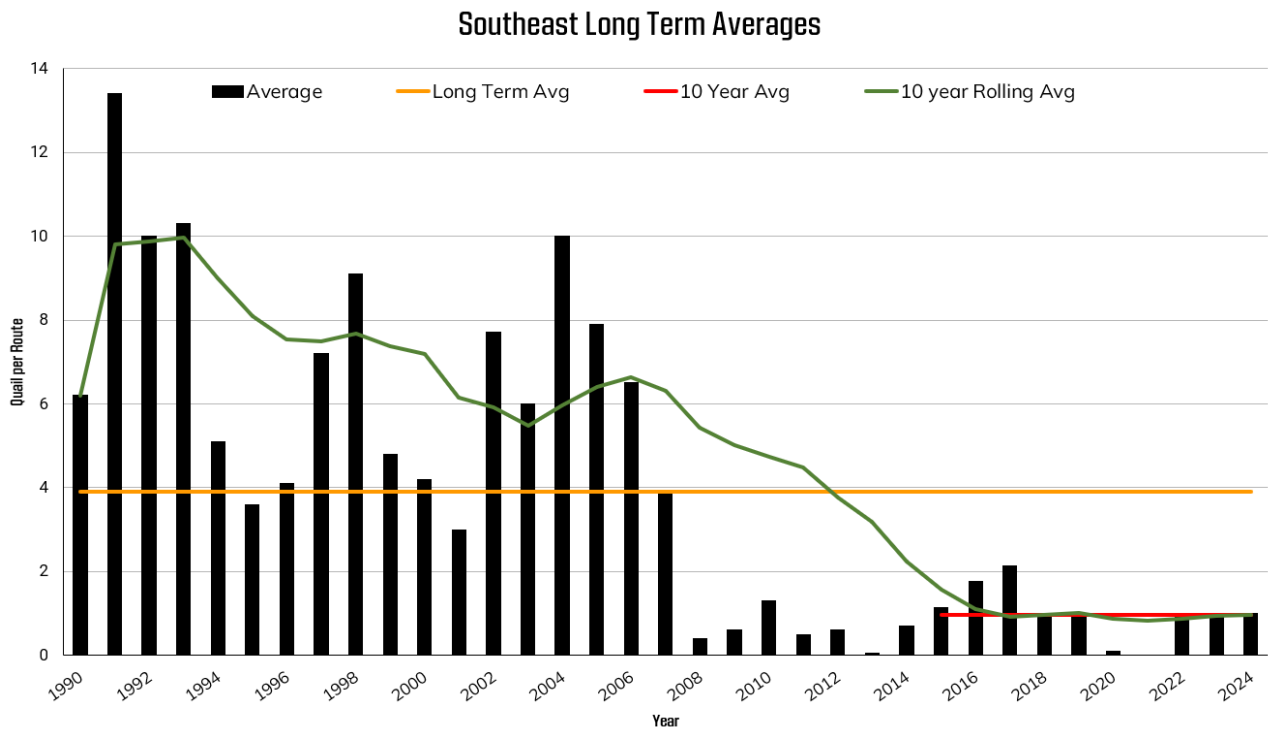


Figure 11: Number of days above 100°F in Oklahoma (Source: Mesonet.org)

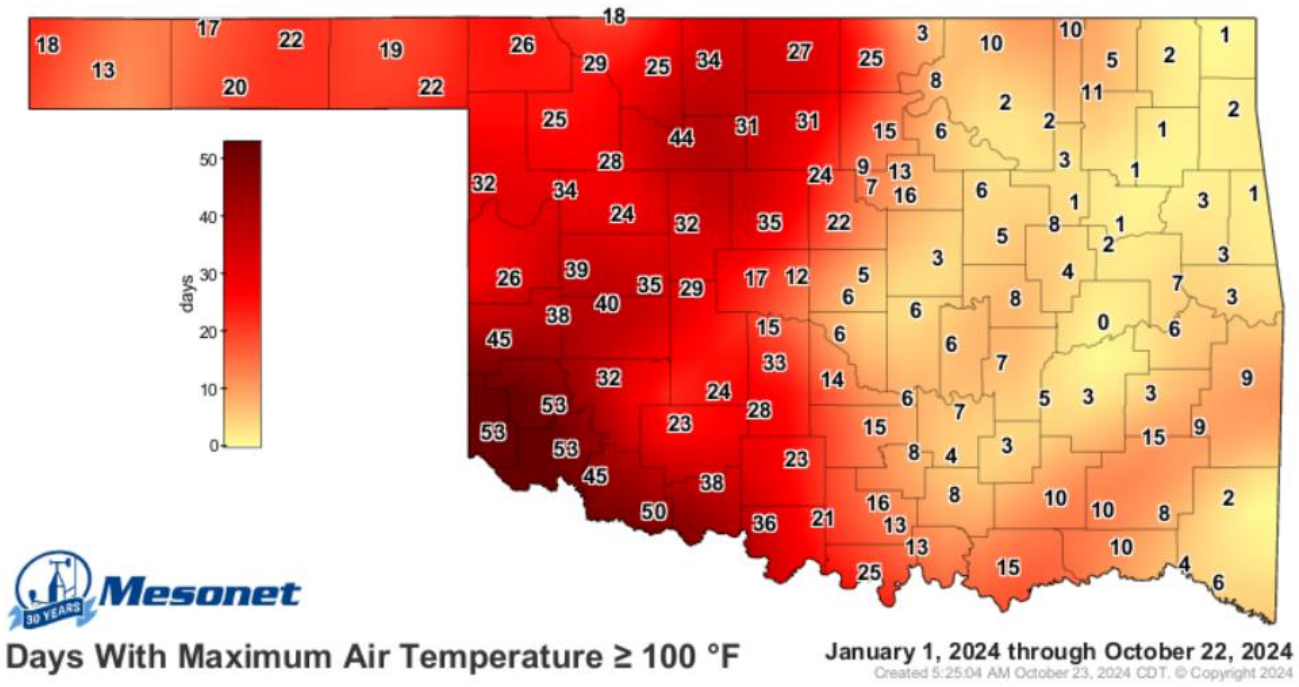


Figure 12: Percentage of Normal Rainfall for the last 120 days in Oklahoma (Source: climate.ok.gov)

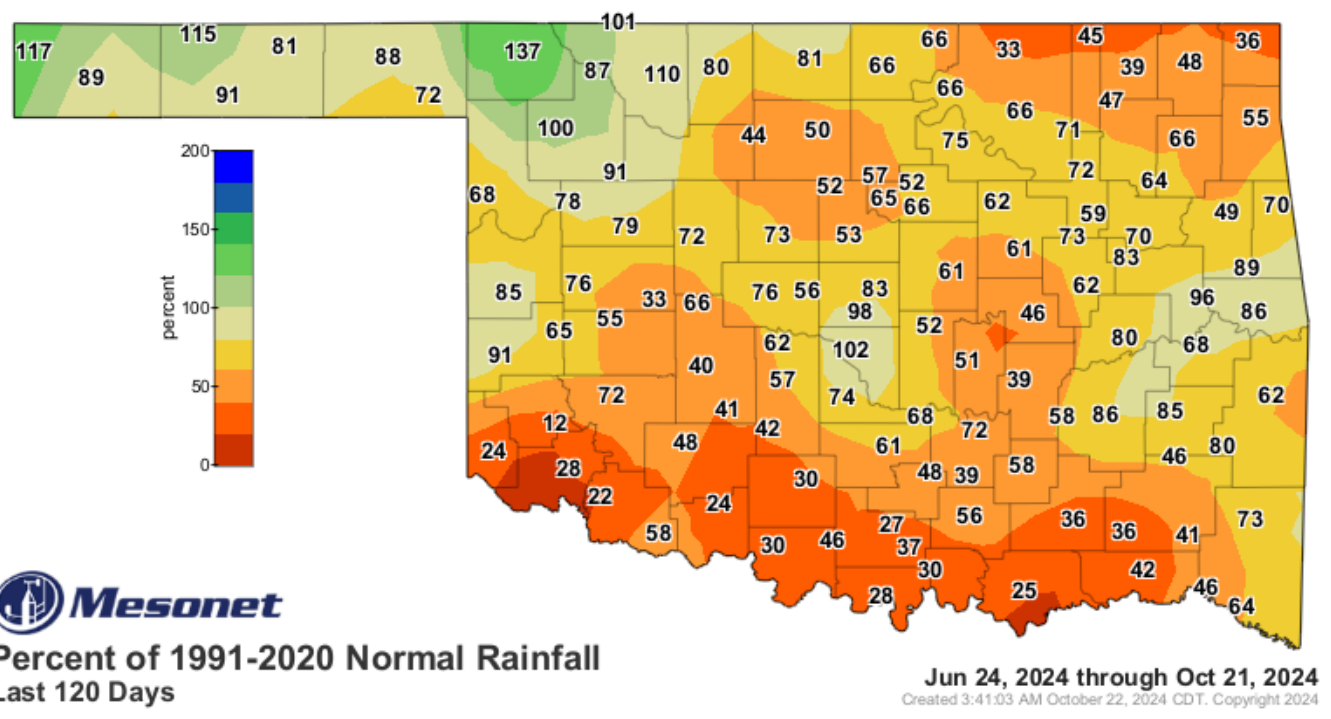


Figure 13: Comparison of Drought Conditions for 2022 (Source: Droughtmonitor.unl.edu)

