State pheasant index up 29 percent from last year

Another mild winter, good nesting season conditions and a slight increase in grassland habitat in the pheasant range all combined to increase Minnesota’s roadside pheasant index by 29 percent compared to last year, according to the Department of Natural Resources.

The 2016 pheasant index is still 14 percent below the 10-year average and 48 percent below the long-term average. Loss of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres statewide remains a concern, as Minnesota may lose about 393,000 acres of CRP land by 2018 because of reduced spending on the program at the national level.

Although CRP acreage continues to shrink in the long term, these losses have been partially offset by acquisitions of land for wildlife management areas and waterfowl production areas, and through more land being put into easement by landowners. Many of these acres were permanently protected through funds provided by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. The acres show the importance of the public investment in permanent conservation compared to temporary programs. However, grasslands are still in short supply overall in the pheasant range.

Roadside survey data

The DNR’s August roadside survey for pheasants showed a 29 percent increase in the overall pheasant index from 2015. This year’s statewide pheasant index was 52.1 birds per 100 miles driven.

All regions had increases in the pheasant index compared to last year except the southeast region which declined 31 percent. The highest pheasant counts were in the southwest, east-central and south-central regions, where observers reported 53 to 96 birds per 100 miles driven.

Compared to 2015, the largest percentage increases were in the central, south central and east-central regions with increases 72 percent, 70 percent and 27 percent, respectively. Hunters will find good harvest opportunities in all regions of the pheasant range except the southeast.
Blanket Flower
Gaillardia aristata

Native perennial forb

Flowers are 1.5-3 inches across with 6-18 3-lobed yellow petals.

Leaves are up to 6 inches long and 1 inch wide. Densely hairy, mostly basal with a few smaller alternate stem leaves.

Part of the Sunflower family. Up to 2 feet tall.

Blooms late spring to early fall.

Thrive in rocky soils with little moisture.

Important for the Dakota Skipper (insect) that is soon to be on the Federal endangered species list.
Lively conversation dwindles as we take the familiar turn down county road 147. The only sounds now are the gravel under the tires and Buddy, our faithful lab whining. He doesn’t make a sound until the wheels hit the gravel on this road. How he knows we’re almost there is a mystery. As the old Blazer rolls to a stop, I step out into the makeshift parking lot, simply a spot laid flat by many truck tires. The native grasses are wet with dew and silent beneath my boots. The sun, just above the horizon creates the illusion of diamonds on the grasses as they move along with the barely there breeze. And the smell? Well, nothing smells like the pheasant opener in Minnesota.

We turn Buddy out and he predictably tears around the truck just to get a bit of the vinegar out. A shrill whistle brings him to heel as we load up, Dad cycling a shell into his worn 870, and for me, a couple of Federal 5s my “new” 1939 L.C. Smith double. Buddy leads us out casting right and left, always the perfect distance out. He takes his time, knowing from experience that we trust his nose, and won’t push him. I frequently lose sight of him, his golden coat melting into the grass. My heart jumps as I mistake him for a runner, a pheasant that decides to run instead of fly. As it sometimes happens, the point comes without warning. Just an instant silence as he almost turns himself inside out, locking up as pretty as any field trial dog, telling us “he’s right there.” My heart now pounding in my chest, we slowly approach. The once silent sound of our feet in the grass now seeming impossibly loud. There to the right, a rustle. Buddy breaks as Dad yells “Roooosterrrrrr!”

Upland hunting is a feast for the senses. It is truly the sights, the sounds and the smells that make the days unforgettable. Unfortunately for us, the very act of hunting threatens to take away one of those senses. Repeated exposure to the muzzle blast of our beloved shotguns has taken the hearing of many of my friends and relatives, reducing the day to something much less than what it was in days past. The sounds of the day are as much a part of the experience as the smell of gun oil or the color on a rooster.

Hearing loss affects an estimated 20% of Americans, around 48 million people. If we look at just hunters, our chance of permanent hearing loss increases at a rate of 7% for every five years we’ve been hunting. Even more alarming is that 38% of target shooters and 95% of hunters reported NEVER wearing hearing protection. One shot from your favorite shotgun can expose you to 140-190 decibels, exposure that can do immediate and permanent damage.

4 Senses are Enough…Right?
By: Kevin Amdahl of Amdahl Hearing
Message From the President

The colors (and temps) of Fall are here, my anticipation is growing for the upcoming Hunts. This is a special time of the year in MN. Crops are being harvested, sounds and sights of migrating waterfowl, and, this year’s hatch matures to adulthood. Truly and special time for hunters and sportsman alike.

The Stearns Chapter is again this year sponsoring locally the DNR Youth/Family Mentor Hunt on October 15, 2016. The Mentor hunt provides an opportunity for Youth ages 12-17 a chance to participate in a guided Pheasant Hunt. Hunting techniques, skills, safety and wildlife habitat are emphasized. Additionally, a Family member may also join the Mentor hunt if they have not Pheasant hunted previously. A special thanks to Stearns County PF Director Ken Fruth and others for leading the Mentor Hunt again this year.

House of Representatives Collin Peterson, met recently with PF National legislative representative, Dave Nomsen to discuss the National and Local concerns regarding the loss of grassland habitat for upland wildlife. Congressman Peterson has been a strong supporter and proponent of Farm Bill Programs that can be a viable option to landowners to increase grassland habitat cover. The Stearns PF Chapter strongly supports Pheasants Forever’s Legislative Action Fund to promote wildlife habitat. Mark your calendars for the 2017 Stearns County PF banquet to be held on March 4th in Sauk Centre next year.

Enjoy this Fall season as you go a-field. Remember to be a Sportsman Hunter, be safe and always ask permission to hunt private lands.

Stearns County Pheasants Forever would also like to congratulate Stearns County PF member, Scott Storm, who recently won the 2017 Minnesota pheasant stamp competition. This will be the 4th time his artwork will be featured on the Minnesota pheasant stamp. He has also been featured on the waterfowl stamp 3 times. A $7.50 pheasant stamp is required by every hunter ages 16-64. Revenue raised by the stamp helps fund pheasant management and habitat work in the state. Good work Scott!

4 Senses are Enough...Right? By: Kevin Amdahl of Amdahl Hearing (Continued)

In the past, hunters really had no options to protect our hearing. I’ve known some to resort to cotton, wax, and even cigarette butts to try to reduce the impact of the blast. None of these were very effective. When commercially available plugs came along, they were effective, but also made it impossible to hear the very sounds we are trying to save, again reducing the experience. Electronic muffs were a bit of an improvement, but still leave a lot to be desired in the areas of bulk and comfort.

Luckily, advances in technology have made hearing protection much better. Hunters can now expect to be able to enjoy all of the sounds of the day, protect their hearing, and have a small, comfortable, custom made device that you will quickly forget is in your ear. Are these devices expensive? Consider for a moment what your experiences are worth. What are your memories worth. You be the judge.

This year, make it a point to protect your hearing. Save the experience. Call your local audiologist to set an appointment for a hearing protection consultation.

4 Senses are Enough...Right? By: Kevin Amdahl of Amdahl Hearing

In the past, hunters really had no options to protect our hearing. I’ve known some to resort to cotton, wax, and even cigarette butts to try to reduce the impact of the blast. None of these were very effective. When commercially available plugs came along, they were effective, but also made it impossible to hear the very sounds we are trying to save, again reducing the experience. Electronic muffs were a bit of an improvement, but still leave a lot to be desired in the areas of bulk and comfort.

Luckily, advances in technology have made hearing protection much better. Hunters can now expect to be able to enjoy all of the sounds of the day, protect their hearing, and have a small, comfortable, custom made device that you will quickly forget is in your ear. Are these devices expensive? Consider for a moment what your experiences are worth. What are your memories worth. You be the judge.

This year, make it a point to protect your hearing. Save the experience. Call your local audiologist to set an appointment for a hearing protection consultation.