Nebraska pheasant hunters should look forward to a good season of wing shooting in 2009 when the opener arrives Oct. 31.

Wildlife surveys in the spring and summer have indicated a statewide increase in pheasant abundance compared to 2008, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

A generally mild winter, then a warm spring, provided favorable conditions for the over-winter survival and subsequent pheasant production.

Hunters should note that lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)-Management Access Program (MAP) have changed, especially in northeast Nebraska.

Because of that, hunters are advised to scout areas to ensure they still will be available to hunt. They also should review the 2009 Nebraska Public Access Atlas, which includes CRP-MAP lands, as well as the new Open Fields and Waters program, and other public hunting lands.

According to the April and July Rural Mail Carrier Surveys, regional pheasant numbers were highest in the Southwest, Northeast and Panhandle pheasant regions.

The population in the Southwest was particularly good, and commission staff believes hunting should be good in most areas of the Southwest.

In the Northeast region, frequent observations of broods have been made in areas with permanent grasslands, such as CRP land.

Increased rainfall in the Panhandle had improved habitat conditions throughout the region, but there is more access for hunting in the northern Panhandle.

Pheasant season is an excellent opportunity for experienced hunters to introduce the activity to a person who never has hunted or reintroduce it to someone who has not hunted in many years.

The pheasant season ends Jan. 31, 2010. Only rooster pheasants may be taken. The daily bag limit is three birds and the possession limit is 12.

All pheasant hunters, except for residents under age 16, are required to have a Nebraska hunting license and a habitat stamp. An annual permit costs $14 for residents and $81 for nonresidents. The annual habitat stamp is $16.

The youth pheasant season is Oct. 24-25, with a bag limit of two and possession limit of four. Hunters in this season must be less than 16 years of age. Birds taken during the youth season do not count against the youth's possession limit during the regular season.

A mentoring opportunity exists in the youth season for adults who want to teach youths how to hunt safely and responsibly. Adults accompanying youth hunters may not shoot pheasants during a youth season hunt.

All hunters must obtain permission to hunt on private land.

Permits and stamps may be purchased at OutdoorNebraska.org.