



THE UPLAND GAZETTE

North Carolina Small Game Notes

Summer 1996

◆ Published by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission ◆

Volume 1, Issue 1

Farm Bill News

The 1996 Farm Bill contains good news for small game hunters. After lengthy debate, Congress passed a bill which places wildlife resources at a level equal to that of soil conservation and water quality. The new bill provides us with *many new opportunities* to use Federal farm programs to enhance wildlife resources. These include:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program—A giant program that combines many former programs into one. Its goals are to protect water quality and improve wildlife habitat. It has implications for activities on rowcrop and animal operations across the state.

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative—This new program is designed to improve management of grazing lands and improve habitat on them.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program—Though funding is low, we have a wildlife habitat improvement program. We hope to focus on a few practices which have potential for broad application across the state such as prescribed fire.

Conservation Reserve Program—Though a bust in the past for states in the Southeast where pine trees and fescue were the plants of choice for CRP lands, early discussions indicate optimism for new lands enrolled in CRP. Wildlifers will push hard to exclude fescue and to require tree plantings to be designed for more wildlife benefits.

Wetlands Reserve Program—This program is designed to protect and restore wetlands through long term leases. North Carolina

(continued on page 5)

Urgent—Quail “Calls” Needed!

No, we are not trying to whistle up singles, but the “phone calls” we need could make a big difference in your hunting success over the next few years.

Much of the credit for the increased emphasis on wildlife in the new Farm Bill is due to an unprecedented effort by sportsmen and conservation groups who maintained regular contact with lawmakers throughout the process of developing Farm Bill legislation. However, the work has just begun because federal legislation provides a framework under which programs are administered at the state and county level.

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission staff has been busy developing specific wildlife recommendations for program implementation in North Carolina. Many of the recommendations will require some changes in the way landowners manage their farms and will require some education and explanation if they are to be implemented.

Our agency has committed to a closer working relationship with agricultural agencies at the state and county level, but we also need your support if we are to successfully change ingrained farm practices which degrade wildlife habitat. Specifically, we need you to reinforce the message that Congress made clear in the new Farm Bill.

By making the following contacts, you could make the difference between a Farm Bill that blows a lot of smoke about wildlife conservation and one that actually get wildlife improvements applied on the ground on the places that you hunt.

Contact your County NRCS and FSA Offices, Soil and Water Conservation District Representatives, and Farm Leaders. Tell them you support 1996 Farm Bill Legislation which places wildlife resources on a level equal to soil and water conservation. Ask them to support practices that improve wildlife habitat through farm programs in your county.

The following general themes provide examples of recommendations that wildlifers are currently making to Farm Agencies.

1. Promote establishment of native grasses or volunteer (natural) plant communities instead of sod forming grasses such as fescue, bermuda, and bahia grass.
2. Discourage mowing during the wildlife nesting season May 15 - September 15.
3. Support wildlife practices such as field borders of native grasses or volunteer vegetation, exclude livestock from woodlands and streamsides, plant trees with wider spacing, and increase the use of fire in woodland management.

Your contact could make farmers and agency personnel in your county more receptive when Wildlife Commission personnel approach them with specific recommendations. Congress has unlocked the door to improving wildlife populations on farmlands, but it will take teamwork and a concerted effort from all to open the door to the many wildlife opportunities offered by the 1996 Farm Bill. We need your help.

THE UPLAND GAZETTE

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Welcome! . . .

. . . to the first edition of the N.C. Wildlife Commission's expanded small game newsletter. Our personnel frequently encounter sportsmen and landowners who are not aware of the variety of small game research, habitat improvement projects, and technical guidance that the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission conducts or supports. These individuals point to our agency's success with deer and turkey programs, but since small game populations have declined, they assume that our emphasis has been focused on big game species. We hope to use this newsletter to keep sportsmen, landowners, and agency personnel informed about the Commission's active small game program.

If you participate in the Avid Grouse or Quail Hunter Survey, you will remain on our mailing list. If you are not a current participant, include your name and address in the slots indicated on the return section of the newsletter, fill out the questionnaire, then mail.

We plan to publish three times each year, so write us with suggestions if you have information that you feel would be useful to other small game hunters and managers. ♦



North Carolina Dove Hunting Regulations

Morning doves are classified by the federal government as migratory birds. Therefore, federal regulations apply and these do not allow the use of bait in hunting doves. Baiting is roughly defined as placing feed, salt, grain, etc., in order to lure doves. Baited areas cannot be hunted until all bait is gone for a period of ten days. There are several methods to legally hunt and not have to worry about violating baiting laws. Crop fields furnish most of the best dove hunting sites in North Carolina. Regulations state that it is legal to hunt doves on farmland where scattered grain is there solely because of normal agricultural operations. Such operations include picked corn fields, sunflowers, etc., feedlots and "hogged down" grain fields. Another opportunity for hunting doves is over crops which are manipulated for wildlife management purposes. This includes fields which are planted specifically for wildlife, including doves. The Wildlife Commission annually maintains a number of these areas. Such fields can be manipu-



lated to enhance their attractiveness to doves. Practices could include, for instance, planting of sunflowers, then mowing or disking strips through the field a week or two prior to the season. Or, the entire field may be mowed, dragged, etc. The key points to remember in agricultural scenarios are that a dove hunting area is legal if it is the result of a legitimate agricultural operation or the result of manipulation of crops for wildlife management purposes. Even top-sowing of grains constitutes a legitimate agricultural operation in some areas. However, if there are questions regarding what constitutes a legitimate agricultural practice in your area, contact the Cooperative Extension Service, or the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (old SCS). Further explanation of federal dove hunting regulations appear in the publication *Dove Hunting The Right Way*, available through U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 75 Spring Street SW, Atlanta, GA 30303.

—Mike Scruggs
District Wildlife Biologist, District 3

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Public Hearing Schedule

Date	District	Location	Time
Mon. Aug. 12	1	Swain Auditorium, Edenton	7:00p.m.
	6	North Stanly High School, Albemarle	7:00p.m.
	9	Southwestern Comm. College, Sylva	7:00p.m.
Tues. Aug. 13	2	Courthouse, New Bern	7:00p.m.
	5	Courthouse, Graham	7:00p.m.
	8	Civic Center Auditorium, Morganton	7:00p.m.
Wed. Aug. 14	3	Courthouse, Nashville	7:00p.m.
	4	Courthouse, Elizabethtown	7:00p.m.
	7	High School, Elkin	7:00p.m.

1995-96 Quail Season Summary

We are now in the 12th year of our Avid Quail Hunter survey in which interested quail hunters keep records of efforts and success rates throughout the season. Each year our Small Game Program biologists use the results of the Avid Hunter Survey to assess trends in bobwhite hunting success in the various regions of the state.

During the 1995-96 season, 179 hunters reported taking 2628 trips (14.7 trips/hunter) and harvesting 6308 birds (2.4 birds/trip) by their respective hunting party. Compared to 1994 data, Coveys/trip increased by a barely detectable amount while birds/trip decreased by a similar minute amount (Figure 1). Both variables remain at all-time lows for the 12 seasons of the Avid Hunter Survey.

As in past seasons, November accounted for the highest rates of quail harvest in each region (Figure 2). From a biological standpoint, this is what we want to see because early season hunting mortality takes advantage of a surplus of birds that would not survive the winter. Once again, the Coastal Plain led the Piedmont and Mountain regions in success rates. We currently have a small number of Mountain hunters, so we probably do not have an accurate picture of quail hunting throughout that region.

In Figure 3, a more detailed breakdown of success is provided showing that the central and northern coastal areas provided the most quail hunting opportunity. This follows normal yearly trends which show these areas of the state to harbor our strongest quail populations.

—Mark Jones
Assistant Small Game Project Leader

Figure 1. Coveys Flushed and Birds Harvested Per Trip by North Carolina Avid Quail Hunters, 1984-95

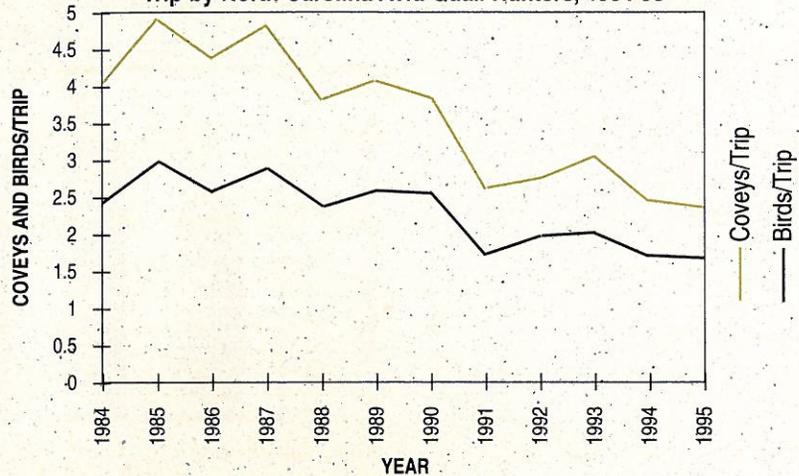


Figure 2. Birds Harvested Per Trip by North Carolina Avid Quail Hunters, 1995-96 Season

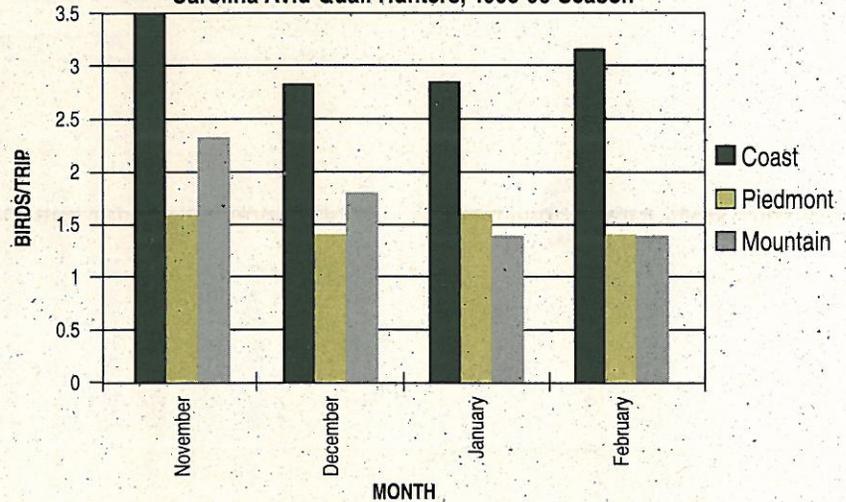
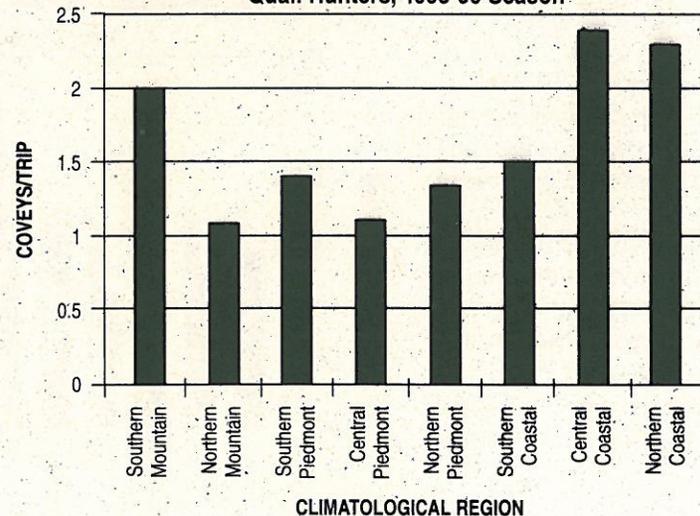


Figure 3. Coveys Flushed Per Trip by North Carolina Avid Quail Hunters, 1995-96 Season



1995-96 Avid Grouse Summary

Hunting success for the 83 hunters who participated in last season's grouse hunter survey declined from that experienced during the previous season. Survey participants reported 1299 hunting trips in 21 counties during which 865 grouse were harvested. The average hunt lasted just under 4 hours.

Grouse hunting parties reported flushing 4.6 birds per trip this season as compared to 5.5 birds per trip during the 1994-1995 season. Birds harvested per trip declined from an average of 0.78 birds per trip in 1994-1995 to 0.67 birds per trip during 1995-1996. Success rates for the 1995-1996 season were slightly below the 12 year average reported by survey participants.



Flush rates (3.85 per trip) and harvest rates (0.53 birds per trip) were lowest during October when birds were dispersed and cover was dense (Figure 1). Both flush and harvest rates increased by about one bird per trip and remained fairly constant during the remainder of the season (November through February). Hunters were most efficient (killed a greater percentage of the birds flushed) during January when 15 birds were harvested for each 100 flushed.

As in past years, hunters in southern mountain counties experienced higher flush and harvest rates than reported in the northern mountains (Figures 2 and 3).

—Terry Sharpe
Small Game Project Leader

Figure 1. Flushes Per Party Hour for Avid Grouse Hunters During Each Month of the 1995-96 Season

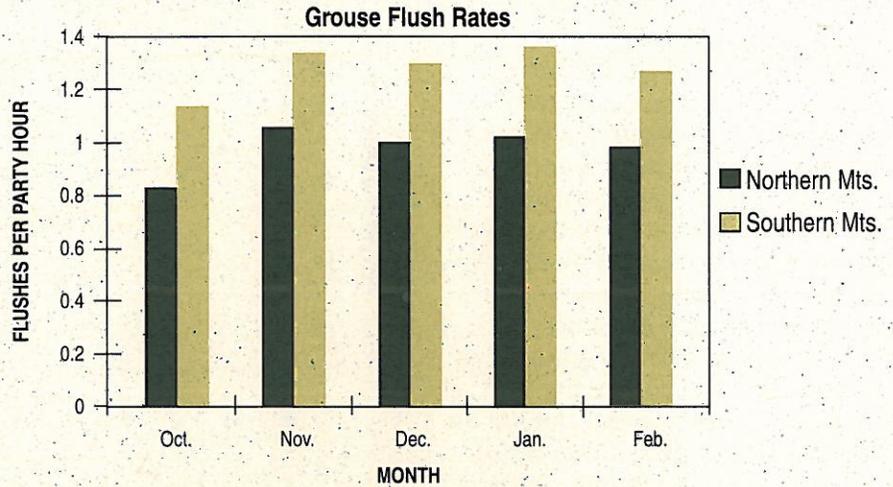


Figure 2. Grouse Flushes Per Party Trip Reported by N.C. Hunters Who Hunt in Northern Mountain Counties and Southern Mountain Counties.

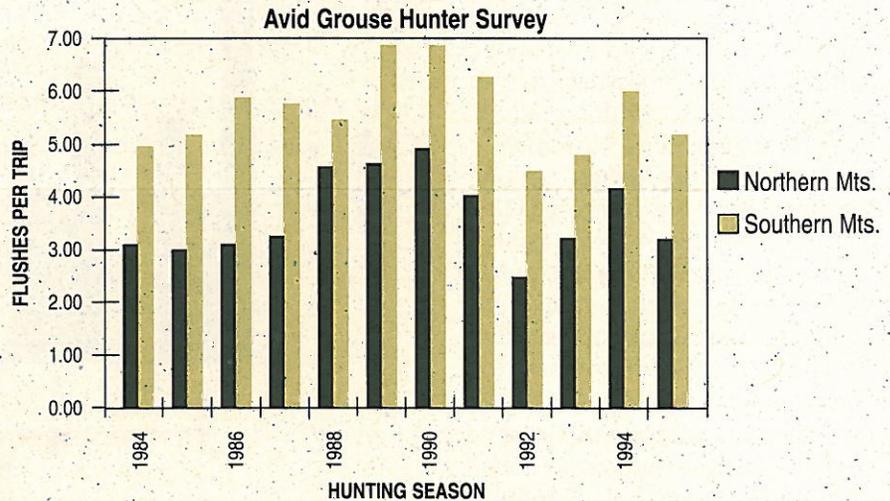
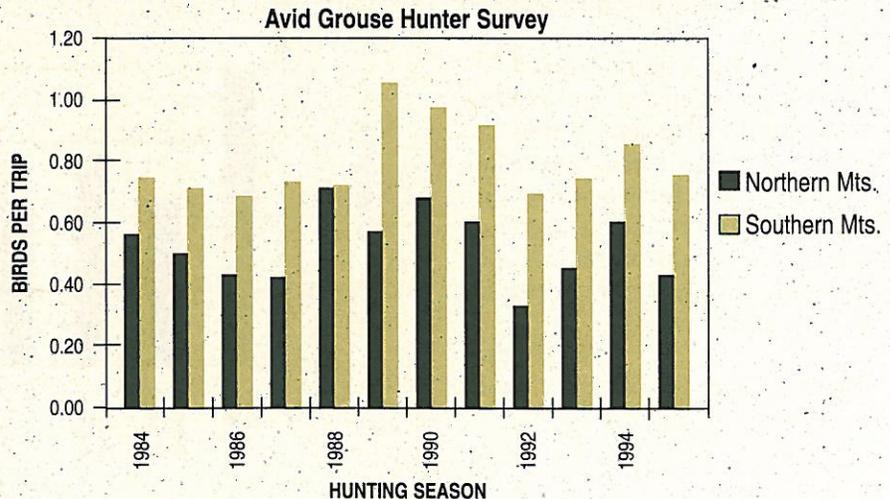


Figure 3. Grouse Harvest Per Party Trip Reported by N.C. Hunters Who Hunt in Northern Mountain Counties and Southern Mountain Counties.



To be added to the mailing list for *The Upland Gazette*, complete the information below and mail to: The Upland Gazette, Division of Wildlife Management, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, 512 N. Salisbury Street, Raleigh, N.C. 27604-1188

(Note: Hunters who participated in last season's Avid Quail and Grouse Hunter Survey will automatically be included in future mailings and do not need to reply.)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ zip _____

I do not wish to participate in hunter surveys, but please include me in future mailings of *The Upland Gazette*.

I would like to be considered for participation in the Avid Quail Hunter Survey. I hunt wild quail approximately _____ times each season in the following counties: _____

I would like to be considered for participation in the Avid Grouse Hunter Survey. I hunt grouse approximately _____ times each season in the following counties: _____

Bobwhite Regulation Proposals to be Discussed at Public Hearings

Quail hunters will be particularly interested in a proposal to be presented at a series of public hearings scheduled in August. Your comments will be important to our Commission when making a decision on season dates. The Commission will solicit comments from the public on a proposed regulation change to close the quail season on February 15 statewide. A shorter quail season has been suggested by many quail hunters across North Carolina in recent years. Reducing the season by implementing an earlier closing or shifting the season earlier is the preferred biological alternative based on research studies which indicate that adult quail mortality is high in the late winter and that birds harvested in

late winter are more likely to reduce subsequent breeding populations.

The recommendation supports a widespread theorem among biologists that many quail taken in early fall quail would subsequently die of other causes, but closing the season earlier may increase breeding stock for the coming year. Research now indicates that the quail that survive to late February would probably live to breed in the spring, were they not otherwise taken by hunters.

An additional note for those hunters fortunate enough to attain the daily bag limit of bobwhites. Following public hearings the Commission voted at its March meeting to reduce the quail bag due to concern by sportsmen for the declining population. Beginning in the upcoming season the daily bag limit has been reduced to 8 birds per day and the possession limit to 16. ♦

Farm Bill *(continued)*

has seen considerable activity in this program in the past.

By the time this newsletter reaches you, more specific regulations will be coming down from the National Offices of Federal Farm Agencies [Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly SCS) and Farm Services Agency (formerly ASCS)]. We expect to have considerable latitude in customizing regulations to fit North Carolina conditions and hope you can help us by making the contacts suggested in the accompanying sidebar. ♦



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McCall Nominations Sought

Nominations of individuals and clubs or organizations are being sought by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission for consideration for the Dr. William H. McCall Small Game Awards.

Awards are made annually to citizens making outstanding achievements in small game work in the state. Nominations will be accepted from July 1 through September 1. Winners will be honored at the January 1997 Commission meeting in Raleigh. For a nomination form, write: Small Game Awards, Division of Wildlife Management, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh, N.C. 27604-1188.

The awards are named in honor of Dr. William H. McCall of Asheville, a former member of the Commission who is a lifetime small

game advocate and member of the National Field Trial Hall of Fame. ♦

Avid Hunters Can Help

We appreciate the grouse and quail hunters who provide information through the Avid Hunter Surveys. Grouse and quail are difficult to census, and the Avid Hunter Surveys provide us with a low cost and reliable index to grouse and quail abundance during the hunting season. Our expanded newsletter circulation may reach some hunters who are not familiar with the surveys. If you grouse or quail hunt and would consider contributing back to the resource by providing a diary of your hunting activity, please let us know by returning the survey on page 5. ♦

Grouse Society Banquet

Ruffed Grouse Society 1996 Sportsmen's Banquet - Saturday, August 24 Great Smokies Holiday Inn Sunspree Resort. Contact Steve Evans (704-667-0958) for more information. ♦

Thank You SAFARI CLUB!

Special thanks goes to the N.C. chapter of Safari Club International. While known worldwide for supporting big game species, SCI is also interested in the proper management of all wildlife, including small game. The conservation organization provided \$3,000 to fund the initial publication of *The Upland Gazette*. ♦

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