

2011 South Dakota Pheasant Prospects

BY DENNIS FOSTER

Despite an overly long and snowy winter, the general outlook for the numbers of pheasants we can expect this fall looks to remain from good to downright phenomenal. I am seeing some very encouraging numbers of hens, with what seems to be about the right number of roosters mixed in. So, based on my on my experience managing a pheasant hunting operation and having lived my entire life where the very first successful introduction of ring-neck pheasants into the wild occurred, I would have to say we are looking at another banner year for 2011.

WHERE

Eastern South Dakota (east of the Missouri River) has been long recognized as a Mecca for pheasants and hunters, as we just seem to have an environment and atmosphere that suits both. The south central portion of the state is a traditional hot spot with the Winner, Platte, and Chamberlain areas always very good, due to somewhat milder winters. You can move north on up the line into the Redfield area (where the first pheasants took root) and expect to see huge numbers of birds as well. If you want to experience a West River hunt, the Eagle Butte area would be a good bet.

WHEN

South Dakota's 2011 season starts on October 15 and runs till January 1, 2012. The first couple of weeks after opening offers fine hunting, but please be aware that it is also the busiest time of the season. It may be advisable to wait until the third weekend or later to plan your hunt. Weather is typically cooler and easier on the dogs (and you); the row crops' harvest has generally been completed (making birds easier to find); and, in general, there are more opportunities for places not only to hunt, but also to stay, as things have slowed down. Personally, I find later season hunts to be more enjoyable.



A happy young lady with her first pheasant.

ACCESS

Gaining permission to hunt private ground can still be done if you are polite and show proper respect for the privilege. Many farmers have family and friends hunting the first few weeks, so you will generally have better success once the initial rush subsides. It also doesn't hurt to offer something in return, and it doesn't have to be in the form of cash. Goodies with your local flavor are always welcomed. Cheeses, various meats, wine, etc. are appreciated and a bottle of darn good whiskey has opened many a gate as well.

There are numerous commercial hunting operations, with most doing an excellent job providing a quality hunt. They offer good value depending upon exactly what you want and how much you are willing to spend. This can range from simply paying for daily access with no guiding on good ground with plentiful birds, all the way up to the kind of places that will only serve their dogs Perrier water and resemble Palm Springs more than the

Dakotas. To each his own...I guess.

The vast majority of these operations will fall somewhere in middle, with fully guided hunts over seasoned dogs and offer other welcome amenities, such as, bird cleaning and lodging. Expect to spend anywhere from \$100 per day for basic hunting rights, to the \$200 per day range for fully guided hunts, and up to "oh my gosh" prices for some of the more luxurious and extravagant lodges (typically "preserves" with pen-raised birds) that cater to the well heeled and corporate crowd. Whatever your needs or desires, something can be found to suit your specific wants and needs.

Dennis Foster is an outdoor writer, as well as, a fishing and hunting guide in South Dakota. You can learn more by visiting www.eyetimepromotions.com or calling him directly at 605-887-7069.

Securing Permission To Hunt Private Property

BY RICK PETREKOVIC

Finding a location to hunt is one of the greatest challenges to the future of hunting. Those of us over age 50 know firsthand that loss of habitat has made it increasingly difficult to find a place to hunt. Everyone cannot afford to lease land, travel out of state, or finance a guided hunt. Thirty years ago it was relatively easy to simply ask for permission in a respectful manner and obtain permission to hunt a reasonable distance from home.

Access to private land to hunt close to home can make the difference between an enjoyable hunting season and giving up the sport. Public land is out there but it is not always in the best possible location. Private land close to home can allow for short evening trips and that provide the continuity necessary to keep us sharp during the entire season. I know personally just a one hour hunt during the best time of the day; during the peak of migration or middle of the rut is all it takes to get me pumped up and alive.

With loss of CRP land, development of former open land, smaller independent farms being purchased by larger corporate farms, and landowners leasing their land out to the highest bidder it has become difficult at best. The decreased availability of private land has increased the pressure dramatically on public land. With all that in mind it is still not impossible to secure permission to hunt private land but we need to be more resourceful and creative in our approach.

Try to follow some of the below suggestions to improve your chances:

1. Be respectful of the landowner. Make it clear that you are a safe, experienced, and respectful hunter. Look the landowner in the eye and make a good first impression. Do not overdress and meet the landowner alone.

2. Provide one page resume of who you are, contact information, association with conservation associations, game you desire to hunt, when you want to hunt, and method of hunting. If you already have permission to hunt a neighbor's land mention it and you will establish some credibility. If you provide all the information in simple manner to the land owner it will be much easier for him to make a decision. If you were the landowner wouldn't you appreciate the information?

3. Do not pressure the landowner if he is working. Do not expect a farmer to climb down from a combine and be receptive. Request permission well in advance of dates you desire to hunt.

4. Any sales presentation should anticipate objections in advance. If



Nick Peterson, Prior Lake, Minn., first turkey secured on private land.

the land owner has livestock make sure you put him at ease that you will respect his wishes as to where and when you can hunt.

5. Ask the landowner if he likes wild game. If he does offer to share some with him. A fresh smoked pheasant, smoked salmon, venison steaks, or jerky made from game harvested from his land will separate you from the rest of the pack and express your sincerity. Ask yourself how you would want to be treated as a landowner. A Christmas gift basket can keep the connection going for the next year.

6. If landowner says no, accept it and be gracious. Things could change in the future. Leave your resume with contact information and follow up the next year.

7. Offer some service in return. Possibly what you do for a living could be offered as a thank you and solidify your long term hunting privileges. Ask the landowner if he could use some help on his land. Be sure to follow through if the landowner says yes.

8. Hunt alone. Do not bring anyone with you. One exception might be if you are mentoring a youth on their first hunt. Do not surprise the landowner.

9. Share some stories and success with the landowner from hunts on their property.

10. Be genuine as landowners can see through any façade.

Securing permission to hunt private land is no longer easy but the value it potentially can provide is more than worth the effort. Get out there and press some flesh, make contacts, follow up, and above all be respectful.

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