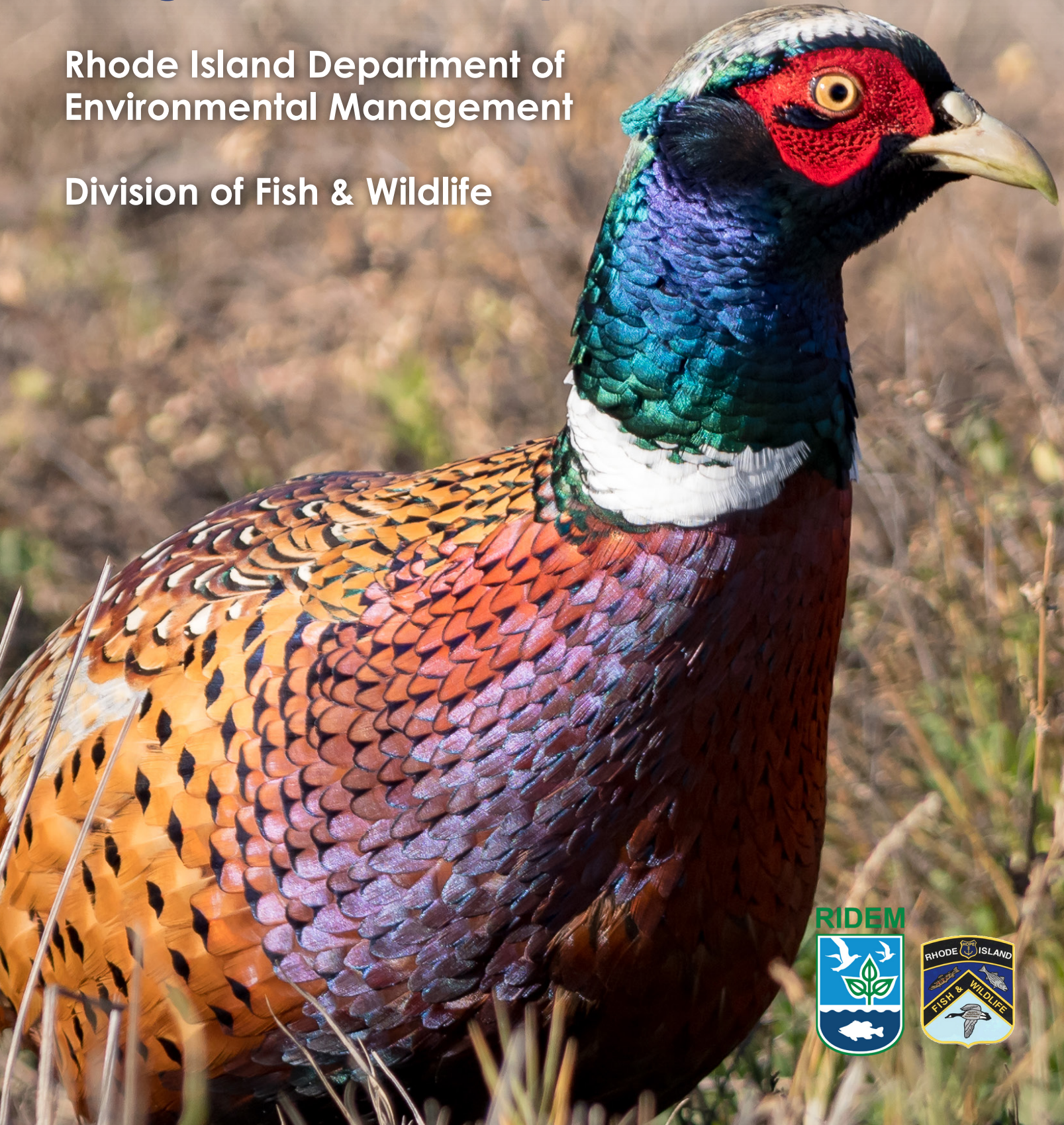


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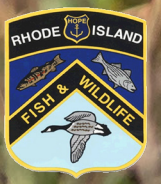
Rhode Island Pheasant Program Summary

Rhode Island Department of
Environmental Management

Division of Fish & Wildlife



RIDEM



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Prepared by the Rhode Island
Department of Environmental Management

Division of Fish & Wildlife
277 Great Neck Road
West Kingston, RI 02892
Phone: (401) 789-0281
Fax: (401)783-7490

Lizzi Bonczek, Upland Game Bird Biologist
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INTRODUCTION

The ring-necked pheasant is native to Asia and was first brought over to the United States in 1881. Since then, pheasant releases occurred throughout the United States and wild populations became established in suitable habitats. In Rhode Island, pheasants became well established in the early 1900s from historic releases. At this time Rhode Island's landscape was dominated by open farmland, pastureland, and grassland. Pheasants could be found statewide, but the largest populations were in southern Rhode Island (e.g., Washington, Bristol, and Newport counties).

State sponsored pheasant stocking began in the 1950s to supplement declining wild population and to provide additional opportunities for upland bird hunters on state land. At present, the only pheasants occurring on mainland Rhode Island are stocked by the RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife or private hunting clubs. The loss of mainland wild pheasant populations in Rhode Island primarily occurred due to landscape changes, with most farmland, pastureland, and grasslands being converted to housing developments and mature forests. This loss of early successional habitat and pheasant nesting cover has similarly caused declines for other species that rely on early successional habitats, including New England cottontail, northern bobwhite, American woodcock, bobolink, prairie warbler, and savannah sparrow. The only remaining wild pheasant population is on Block Island (New Shoreham).

This document provides a summary of the 2025–2026 pheasant hunting season and pheasant hunter survey results, with additional stocking updates for the 2026–2027 season.

2025–2026 SEASON DATES, BAG LIMITS AND ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The 2025–2026 pheasant season started on October 18, 2025, through February 28, 2026. Pheasant stocking occurred from October 18, 2025, through December 27, 2025. A gamebird permit is required to hunt pheasants (outside of RI shooting preserves) and the daily bag limit is 2 either-sex birds. Legal hunting hours are sunrise to sunset.

A youth season occurred the weekend prior to the opener, October 11–13, 2025. Fifty pheasants each were stocked at Nicholas Farm, Eight Rod Farm, and Great Swamp Management Areas.



2026-2027 REGULATION CHANGES

As of 2025, the youth pheasant weekend, which has only included Saturday and Sunday in the past, is now extended to include the Monday following the second Saturday in October. This Monday often coincides with a federal holiday.

2026-2027 PHEASANT STOCKING LOCATIONS

Note: The number of birds and locations stocked are subject to change.

Each ([MAP](#)) is linked to an updated georeferenced map detailing pheasant stocking location on each wildlife management area.

Providence County

- Black Hut Management Area, Burrillville ([MAP](#)), 340 birds/season, stocked 2x/week
- Buck Hill Management Area, Burrillville ([MAP](#)), 490 birds/season, stocked 2x/week
- Durfee Hill Management Area, Glocester ([MAP₁](#)) ([MAP₂](#)), 440 birds/season, stocked 2x/week*

Kent County

- Big River Management Area, West Greenwich ([MAP](#)), 370 birds/season, stocked 2x/week
- Nicholas Farm Management Area, Coventry ([MAP₁](#)) ([MAP₂](#)), 470 birds/season, stocked 2x/week

Washington County

- Arcadia Management Area, Richmond/Exeter ([MAP₁](#)) ([MAP₂](#)) ([MAP₃](#)) ([MAP₄](#)), 1590 birds/season, stocked 2x/week
- Carolina Management Area, Carolina ([MAP₁](#)) ([MAP₂](#)) ([MAP₃](#)), 840 birds/season, stocked 2x/week
- Great Swamp Management Area, West Kingstown ([MAP](#)), 840 birds/season, stocked 2x/week *

* *Additional stocking for youth weekend not included in total birds/season*

Newport County

- Eight Rod Farm Management Area, Tiverton ([MAP](#)), 340 birds/season, stocked 1x/week*
- Sapowet Management Area, Tiverton ([MAP](#)), 240 birds/season, stocked 1x/week
- Simmons Mill Management Area, Little Compton ([MAP](#)), 40 birds/season, stocked 1x/week**

* *Additional stocking for youth weekend not included in total birds/season*

***No December stocking at this location*

2026-2027 SPECIAL HUNT OPPORTUNITIES

A youth pheasant hunt will be held on October 10–12, 2026 at the Great Swamp, Durfee Hill, and Eight Rod management areas. Each site will be stocked with 50 pheasants prior to the youth weekend. Youth pheasant hunters must have either a Junior Hunting License (age 12-14) or Hunting License (age 15-17) and a Game Bird Permit. Junior hunters must be accompanied by a 21+ adult with a valid Hunting License and youth hunters (age 15-17) must be accompanied by a parent, guardian, or qualified adult 21+.

There may be additional opportunities for mentored pheasant hunts through the Rhode Island Hunter Education Program. Please monitor the RI hunter education social media or [website](#) for details.



2025-2026 PHEASANT HUNTER SURVEY RESULTS

A total of 1,645 game bird permits were sold during the 2025–2026 hunting season. This is a slight increase from the 1,512 permits sold during the 2024–2025 season. All hunters who purchased a game bird permit and had a valid email address in the online licensing system were sent a pheasant hunter survey and we obtained 460 responses, the same as the 461 responses from the year before. Based on the hunter survey, 76% of respondents who purchased a game bird permit hunted during the 2025–2026 season, while 24% did not hunt (n=460 responses). This equates to an estimate of 1,255 pheasant hunters in Rhode Island. Pheasant hunters harvested an average (mean) of 5 birds during the 2025–2026 season (n= 325 responses), a decrease by 1 bird per hunter from the past year average of 6 birds per season, but an increase from 2022–2023 of 4 birds per season. Pheasant harvest ranged from 0–40 birds, with about 30% of respondents harvesting > 5 birds. More than half of the pheasant hunters in Rhode Island hunted over dogs (72%). Thirteen respondents commented on the extent of mowing paths in the pheasant fields; 38% felt there were too many paths and 62% felt there were too few paths. Rhode Island pheasant hunters have on average 15 years (n=324 responses) of pheasant hunting experience with a range of 1-62 years. Half of pheasant hunters (50%) responded that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the 2025–2026 pheasant season, a decrease from the previous year, while 28% of pheasant hunters responded that they were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied.

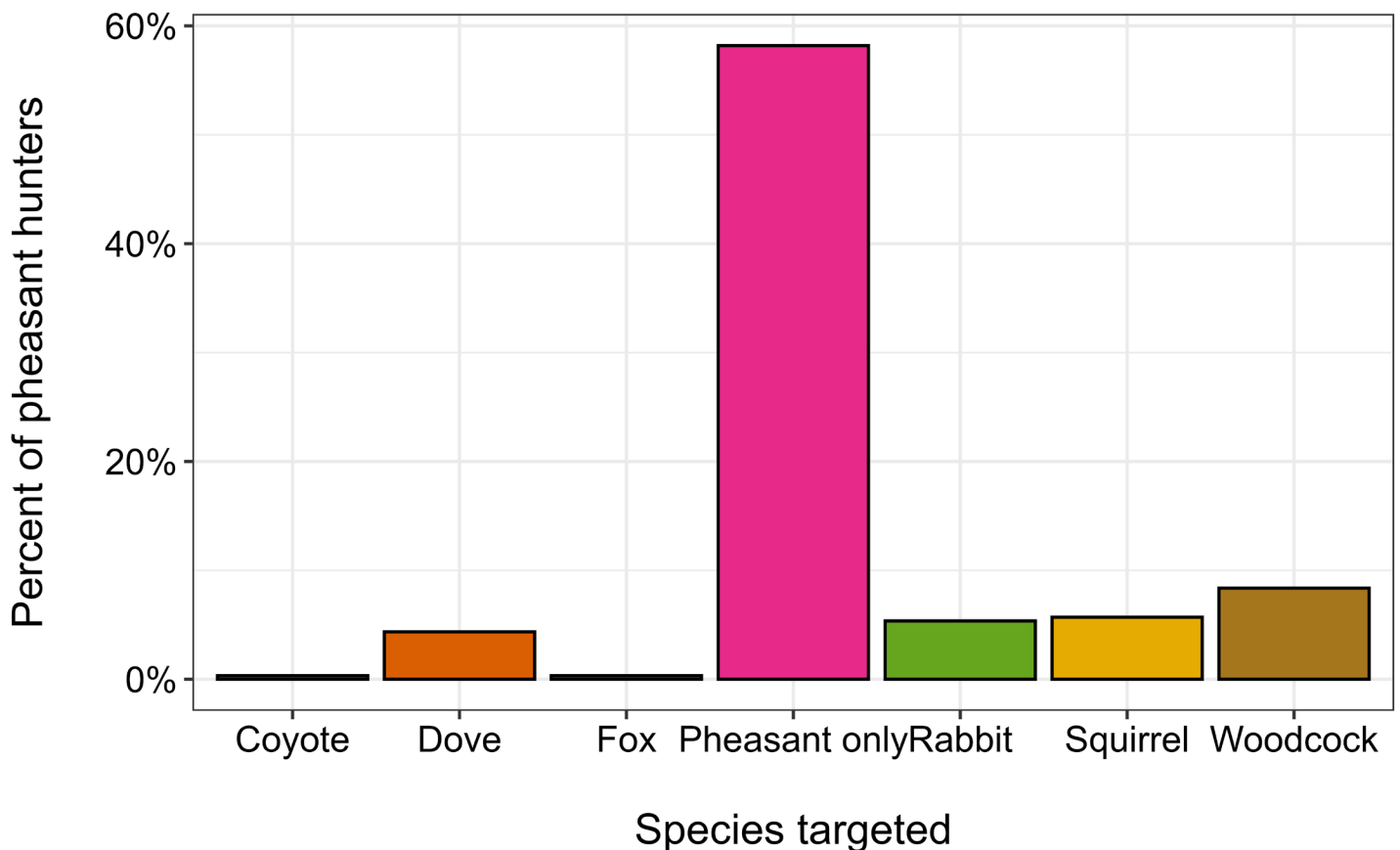


Figure 1. Upland bird and small game species taken by hunters who purchased a game bird permit during the 2025–2026 hunting season in Rhode Island. Additionally, 24% of respondents did not harvest any game. Figure based on 299 respondents.

Most respondents (58%) who purchased a game bird stamp only harvested/targeted pheasants and did not harvest other small game species while pheasant hunting. A proportion of pheasant hunters also harvested woodcock (8.4%), squirrels (5.7%), cottontail rabbits (5.4%), mourning doves (4.4%), coyote (0.3%), and fox (0.3%; Figure 1).

Although pheasant hunters often participate in other hunting opportunities, a large proportion of pheasant hunters (37%) started hunting in Rhode Island through pheasant hunting. One quarter of pheasant hunters only hunted pheasants in Rhode Island during the 2025–2026 season. Some of these hunters are out of state hunters from Connecticut and Massachusetts and travel to Rhode Island for Sunday hunting opportunities and/or extended stocking seasons. Pheasant hunters participated in waterfowl (40.2%), white-tailed deer [muzzleloader] (38.3%), white-tailed deer [archery] (35.8%), white-tailed deer [shotgun] (32.6%), spring wild turkey (29.1%), other migratory gamebirds (doves, woodcock, etc.; 30.7%), small game (rabbits and squirrels; 28.4%), coyote hunting (9.3%), racoon hunting (3.2%), and wild turkey fall (10.9%) hunting. A small portion of pheasant hunters, 2.2%, participated in trapping and fox hunting.

Hunter use was highest at the Arcadia, Carolina, and Great Swamp management areas during the 2025–2026 season (Figure 2) in both number of hunters which use an area and days afield. Simmons Mill management area had the lowest use overall but only has one wildlife opening for pheasant stocking. Hunter use was generally correlated to the size of the wildlife area, with more hunters spending more days hunting at management areas with a greater numbers of fields (Figure 2). Arcadia is the largest wildlife area in Rhode Island and has many fields in which pheasants are stocked.

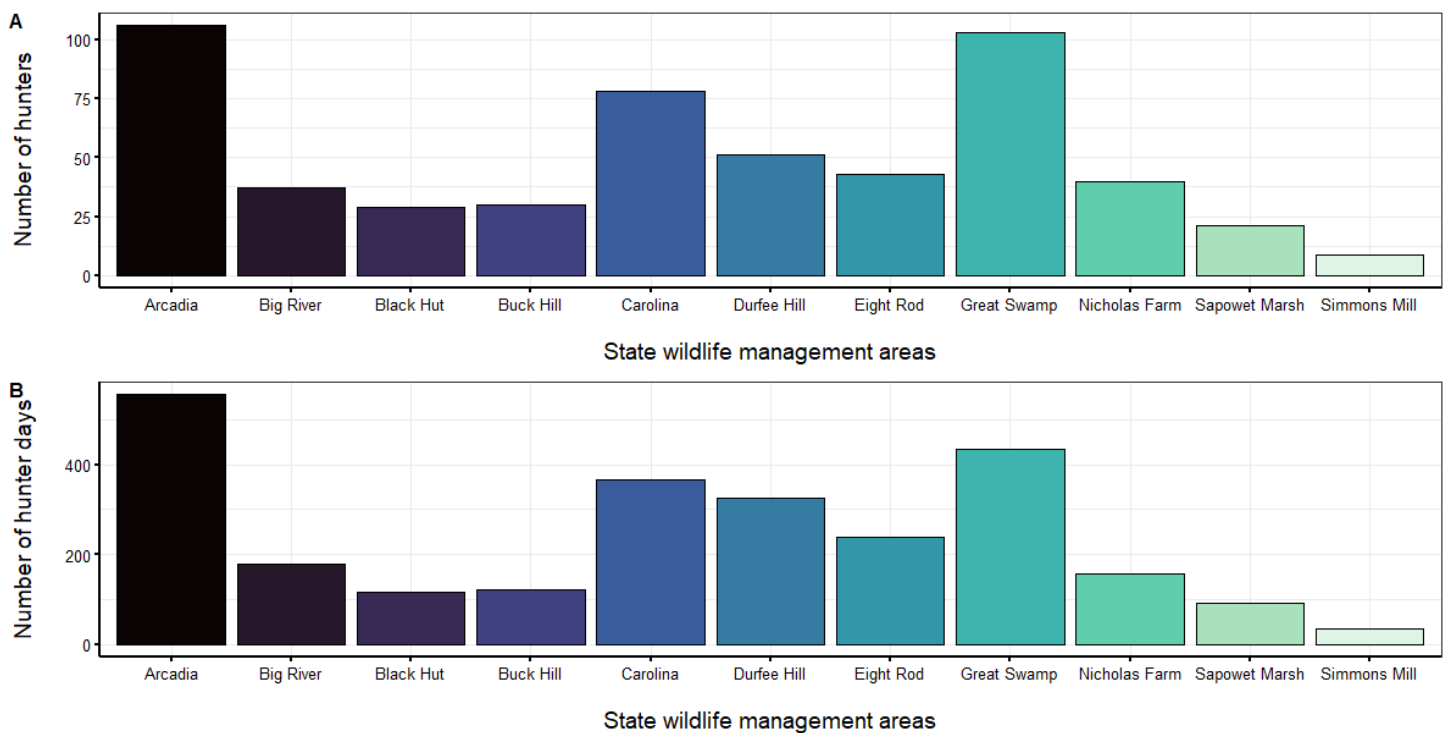


Figure 2. The number of pheasant hunters that used state wildlife management areas during the 2025–2026 pheasant season ranged from 9 to 106 (A), but the number of days hunters spent at each management area varied widely (B), with Arcadia being the most heavily hunted area. Figure based on 315 respondents.

Although pheasant hunters often participate in other hunting opportunities, a large proportion of pheasant hunters (40%) started hunting in Rhode Island through pheasant hunting. Only 23.8% of pheasant hunters only hunted pheasants in Rhode Island during the 2024–2025 season. Some of these hunters are out of state hunters from Connecticut and Massachusetts and travel to Rhode Island for Sunday hunting opportunities. Pheasant hunters participated in waterfowl (42.4%), white-tailed deer [archery] (39.3%), white-tailed deer [muzzleloader] (36.6%), white-tailed deer [shotgun] (35.2%), spring wild turkey (33.8%), other migratory gamebirds (doves, woodcock, etc.; 33.1%), small game (rabbits and squirrels; 30.0%), predator hunting (13.1%), and wild turkey fall (9.1%) hunting. A small portion of pheasant hunters, 4.8%, participated in trapping.

Hunter use was highest at the Arcadia, Carolina, and Great Swamp Management Areas during the 2024–2025 season (Figure 4) in both number of hunters which use an area and days afield. Simmons Mill management area had the lowest use overall, but only has one wildlife opening for pheasant stocking. Hunter use was generally correlated to the size of the wildlife area, with more hunters spending more days hunting at Arcadia Management Area (Figure 4). Arcadia is the largest wildlife area in Rhode Island and has many fields in which pheasants are stocked.

For the fifth year in a row, 6,000 pheasants were stocked on state wildlife management areas during the 2025–2026 season. The addition of 2,000 stocked pheasants has increased pheasant hunter participation by 20% with 1,645 hunters purchasing a Game Bird permit in 2025, up from 1,365 permits in 2019 (when 4,000 pheasants were stocked). About 40% of hunters responded that the 2025–2026 pheasant season was their first-, second-, or third-year pheasant hunting and of these, about 40% had a mentor help guide them. Furthermore, 25% of respondents said that they introduced a new hunter to pheasant hunting.

Rhode Island has one of the lowest rates of hunting participation with 0.7% of residents purchasing hunting licenses and is tied with California and Hawaii. Only 5.1% of survey respondents identify as female, while nationally between 9-10% of hunters identify as female. Female hunting participation in Rhode Island is about half of the national average, and female hunting participation is one of the fastest growing demographic groups in North America. Similarly, less than 1.0% of respondents were between the ages of 12 to 18 years old and 12.7% were 19 to 30 years old. While there may be some survey bias, with fewer younger hunters participating in the online survey, this general trend indicates that there is little youth participation in the pheasant hunting program. For comparison, 29.0% of pheasant hunters are between the ages of 31 to 45 years old, 24.2% of hunters are 46 to 60 years old, and 32.5% of hunters are 61 years or older.



PHEASANT HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS

April through May, we conducted prescribed burns on 2 Wildlife Management Areas. Prescribed burns help limit the growth of woody species and invasives, burn off the grass thatch layer to promote native, warm season grasses and allow more sunlight to penetrate the ground, and release nutrients to improve soil quality. We conducted prescribed burns of ~21.5 acres of the southernmost pheasant fields at Great Swamp Management Area and ~11.5 acres of the southernmost pheasant fields at Eight Rod Management Area. We expect these burns to help produce more robust grasslands and improve pheasant cover and are hopeful that invasive vines will be reduced at Eight Rod. We mowed fields at Arcadia, Big River, Black Hut, Buck Hill, Carolina, and Great Swamp Management Areas and plan to plant 2 sparser fields within Midway in Arcadia in buckwheat/partridge pea.

With a land clearing contract in place, we cut a combined 16.5 acres at Buck Hill Management Area around the northern-most cluster of pheasant fields on the west side of the road and connected two smaller fields to the south on the west side of the road. These cuts will create an early successional transition zone between grassland and mature forest, with a goal of better holding pheasants in the area and will allow increased sunlight into the fields. We also hope to conduct stump grinding in the future to expand field footprint, depending on staff and equipment availability. The contractor also masticated 2 acres at the pheasant field off KG Ranch Road in Arcadia to reduce woody vegetation and prepare the area for future prescribed burns and ~8 acres at Eight Rod to reduce autumn olive groves. The designated land clearing season runs January 1 until April 1 to limit disturbance to hunters in the fall and breeding wildlife in the late spring/summer.



CONCLUSION

The 2025–2026 pheasant hunting season in Rhode Island was a safe and successful season. Pheasant hunter participating a wide variety of Rhode Island hunting programs throughout the fall and winter. Feedback gathered from the hunter survey combined with hunter use of wildlife management areas will be used to guide stocking efforts for the upcoming 2026–2027 season. Six-thousand pheasants will be stocked during the 2026–2027 season from October through December. Our goal is to ensure that we are providing hunters with the best opportunities possible while stocking birds in areas of suitable habitat.

During the 2025–2026 pheasant hunter survey we collected demographic information from participants, and we found that both youth participation and female participation were relatively low for pheasant hunting. Youth participation and recruitment is important to replace an aging hunter community in Rhode Island and ensure pheasant hunting remains a strong tradition in the Rhode Island. Additionally, female participation in hunting is growing nationwide and currently Rhode Island's female participation rate is half of the national average! Pheasant hunters should take advantage of the youth pheasant season (weekend prior to pheasant opener) to introduce youth to pheasant hunting and should make conscious efforts to create opportunities for more youth and females to participate in pheasant hunting.

Feedback is welcome regarding this report by emailing Elizabeth.Bonczek.ctr@dem.ri.gov