

While 2013 drought conditions improved, numbers still uncertain

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Drought conditions were better this year compared to 2012, making Game & Parks Conservation Officer Dirk Greene of Imperial anxious to see how successful pheasant hunters will be this season.

Nebraska's pheasant season opens this Saturday, and southwest Nebraska still ranks among the best places to hunt.

Greene said more rain this year than last was welcomed, yet it normally takes an area more than a year to recover.

During the critical spring nesting season, a lot of factors come into play including how much cover was available, haying activity and grazing, he noted.

One positive he saw was the additional rain received this year which produced more weeds, drawing insects. That's beneficial to the young birds as a food source, he said.

Time will tell.

"I'm anxious to see how things look this weekend," he said.

In his general patrolling, Greene said he didn't see as many pheasants this summer as other years.

That doesn't mean they're not out there. Getting the corn and other crops out will give a better picture, too, he added.

Pheasant season runs from Oct. 26 to Jan. 31, 2014.

Shooting hours are from 30 minutes before sunrise to sunset. Hunters can use a shotgun (10 gauge or smaller), bow and arrow or crossbow to hunt pheasant.

Hunters have a daily bag limit of three, with 12 in possession. Only rooster pheasants can be hunted in Nebraska; taking of hens is not allowed.

For those who choose to clean a bird in the field and then transport it back home, Greene reminds them to leave either a foot or the head attached for sex identification, if stopped by an officer.

"We've had a problem with this in the past," he said.

Wearing orange important

While it's not required to wear orange while hunting pheasant, Greene highly recommends it.

"It's a good idea to be visible," he said.

He is happy to see more orange being worn by pheasant hunters in the area. It's especially vital when hunting in groups, in heavy cover and on rolling terrain, he said.

Greene also reminds hunters to get permission when hunting on private land, as well as on railroad right-of-way, and to stay more than 200 yards away from farmsteads, residences and feedlots.

For those who do not have access to private land, he suggests checking the Nebraska Game & Parks website located at outdoornebraska.org for private lands participating in the Open Fields and Waters Program, previously known as the CRP Walk-In Hunting Program.

Those participating lands are marked by yellow signs stating "Hunting permitted by walking

only.”

Enders Reservoir also has public hunting areas available.