



WHERE TO HUNT

Sage grouse are dependent upon sagebrush year-round and are never found far from it. In September sage grouse have begun a gradual movement from breeding areas (wet meadow areas) to wintering areas (usually taller and denser sagebrush). During this time the best areas to hunt are not large tracts of dense sagebrush, but stands of moderate density and height. They use the taller, denser sagebrush in winter as snow depth increases.

Large areas of sage grouse range in Colorado are on public lands (mostly Bureau of Land Management land). Maps showing landownership are available at a small cost from the BLM (Denver Federal Center) or the Colorado Division of Wildlife (6060 Broadway, Denver).

HOW TO HUNT

Sage grouse move to water to drink at daybreak and, to a lesser degree, in the evening. After drinking (dew and melting frost are sometimes sufficient for their water needs), they move to open sagebrush, alfalfa fields or meadows to feed. They rest during mid-day in taller sagebrush for shade and concealment from predators.

Look for signs (droppings, tracks, and feathers) to identify areas sage grouse have been using. Usually they will be in the same general area year after year as long as weather conditions are about the same. Droppings are $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch in diameter and 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and usually pointed on one end. Tracks are 2 to 3 inches in total length.

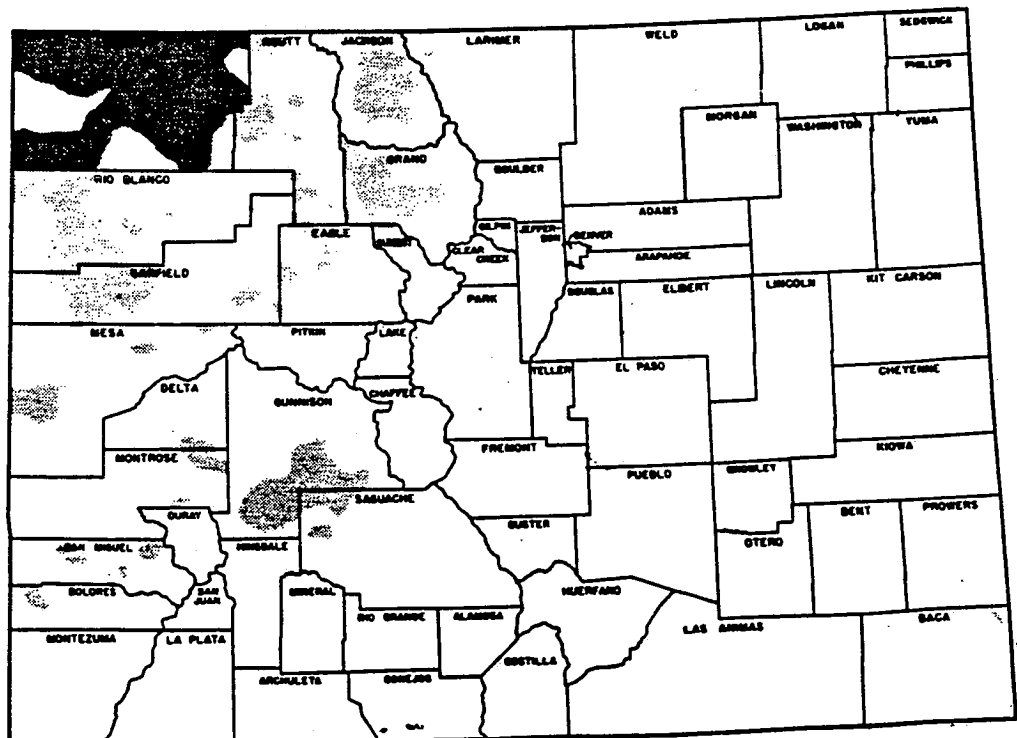
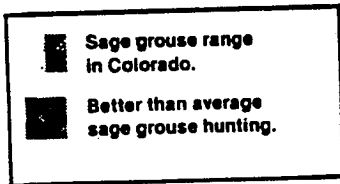
If you are hunting alone or with one or two companions, you can walk a zig-zag course to more effectively cover a likely area. If you are in a group of hunters, the members should spread 30 to 50 yards apart and walk abreast through the area selected to hunt. Hunt into the wind, with the sun at your back and keep noise to a minimum. Sage grouse will run and hide if cover is sufficient to conceal them.

When sage grouse flush, there is a fluttering of wings and

WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT SAGE GROUSE IN COLORADO

GENERAL INFORMATION

Sage grouse are large game birds. Adult males average 5 to 7 pounds, whereas females average 3 pounds. Both sexes have pointed tails, upper bodies mottled with grayish-brown, buff and black, and a blackish abdomen that contrasts with white under-wing feathers when in flight. Males have a black V-shaped pattern on the neck. Females lack the distinctive black and white coloration on the neck and breast. Hunters can be relatively sure they've flushed sage grouse when large chicken-like birds with pointed tails and black abdomens laboriously take flight out of sagebrush.



usually a cackling noise is made. They are relatively slow in rising, showing some difficulty in getting their large bodies airborne and to good flight speed. Once they have attained equilibrium they fly relatively fast and usually fly or sail far enough to land out-of-sight. If they land in view, proceed rapidly to the area. Although they usually run after landing, they may be found not far from there.

Sage grouse tend to flush at greater distances as they become wary during the season. Extra precautions to prevent them from flushing too far away are worthwhile since they require a solid hit to bring them down. If sage grouse flush within 40 yards, they make easier targets to hit than most game birds because of their large size and the openness of the terrain.

EQUIPMENT

The most common firearm used to hunt sage grouse is the 12-gauge shotgun using #6 shot in a high power load. An improved cylinder to modified choke are the most versatile chokes.

Good footwear is a must because successful sage grouse hunting in Colorado usually requires a great deal of walking. Sturdy trousers or leggings are an advantage in walking through miles of sagebrush. Afternoon showers and dew frequently make the sagebrush and other vegetation wet

enough to soak footwear and pant legs. Water resistant boots and pants and extra pairs of socks can be a big help in maintaining comfort. Mornings during the season are seasonably cool to cold, yet mid-day temperatures may get hot. Layered clothing is recommended.

Dogs are an asset in finding and flushing hiding birds and retrieving wounded grouse in tall, dense vegetation.

A game pouch or carrying strap is handy to help carry the large and heavy sage grouse.

HANDLING THE MEAT

Sage grouse should be field dressed (entrails removed) as soon as possible. If the entrails have been ruptured, the body cavity should be washed to prevent tainting by the sagebrush contents. The carcass should be cooled rapidly. A feathered head or wing must remain attached to the bird until it is at the destination where it will be consumed.

Young birds may be prepared like chicken or other game birds. Adult sage grouse are tougher and have a much stronger taste and odor to the meat than young birds. Don't be discouraged if you do not like the taste of the first sage grouse you prepare. Try another recipe or consult someone with experience at cooking adult sage grouse to find other ways to make sage grouse palatable to you.



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