

Proposed Upland Game Bird Regulations 2024-2025

Scobey, MT- January 17, 2024



Meeting Schedule

- Introductions and Purpose
- Season Setting Process
- Review proposed Upland Game Bird Regulations for 2024 & 2025 & Amendments
- Review Region 6 game bird population and hunting data
- Public discussion and feedback
- How to submit formal public comments



Introductions

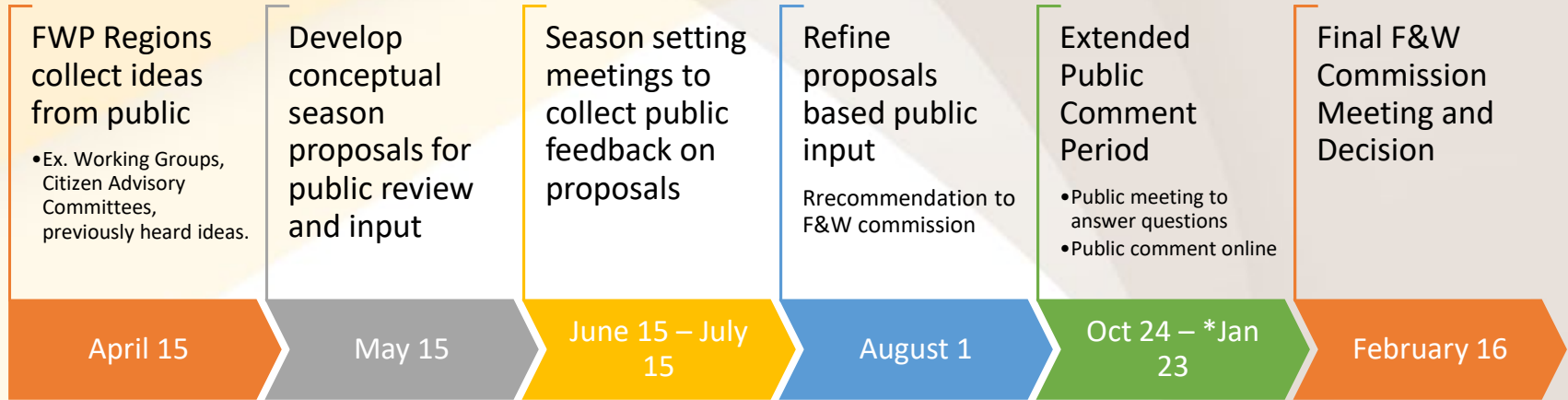


Purpose of this Meeting

- Proposed season changes are now open for public comment
- Early feedback indicated extra interest in upland game bird hunting in Eastern Montana- especially hunter pressure and dog training
- Present proposed upland bird hunting regulation changes and relevant background information about these two topics
- Answer questions about proposals and information so you can make informed comments to the Fish and Wildlife Commission
- We will not be recording comments at this meeting– Please comment online at:
 - <https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/commission/february-2024-meeting>



Season Setting Process



- Coversheet for the Upland Game Bird Season Setting Proposal available in room or online:
 - <https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/commission/february-2024-meeting>



Proposed UGB Regulations '24-'25

- Proposed: Maintain 2022-2023 season dates and bag limits

Season dates 2024:

Season 2024	Dates
Sage-grouse	9/1-9/30
Sharp-tailed Grouse	9/1-1/1
Mountain Grouse	9/1-1/1
Partridge	9/1-1/1 (except for portion of Carbon County where it is 9/1-1/10)
Pheasant	10/12- 1/1
Youth Pheasant/Waterfowl	9/21-9/22 (weekend before general waterfowl opens)
Turkey spring	4/15-5/31
Turkey fall	9/1-1/1



Proposed UGB Regulations '24-'25

- Season Dates 2025:

Season 2025	Dates
Sage-grouse	9/1-9/30
Sharp-tailed Grouse	9/1-1/1
Mountain Grouse	9/1-1/1
Partridge	9/1-1/1 (except for portion of Carbon County where it is 9/1-1/10)
Pheasant	10/11- 1/1
Youth Pheasant/Waterfowl	9/27-9/28 (weekend before general waterfowl opens)
Turkey spring	4/15-5/31
Turkey fall	9/1-1/1



Proposed UGB Regulations '24-'25

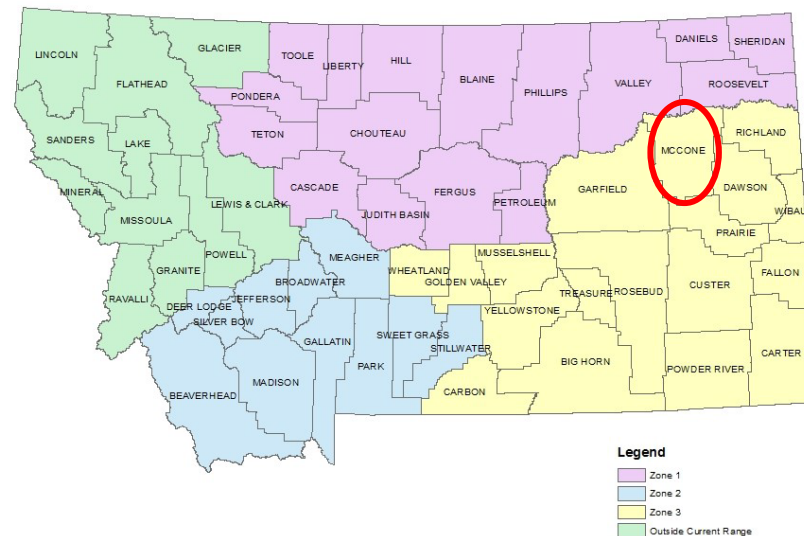
- Bag Limits- same as previous 2 years

Species	Daily Bag Limit	Possession Limit/Notes
Sage-grouse	2	2 times daily limit
Sharp-tailed Grouse	4	4 times daily limit
Mountain Grouse	3	4 times daily limit
Partridge	8	4 times daily limit
Pheasant	3 cocks	3 times daily limit
Turkey spring	1	1 (Male only)
Turkey fall	1	1 (either sex)
Turkey- Regional Licenses	Varies; 1-4	Varies; Regions 1, 2, 5, 7 only
Ptarmigan	Closed	Small & isolated populations



Proposed UGB Regulations '24-'25

- Sage grouse season proposal
 - Close Habitat Management Zone 3 (Southeast & Southcentral MT) only if spring 2024 counts are $\geq 45\%$ below average for 3rd year in a row.



Proposed UGB Regulations '24-'25

- Maintain Dog Training Regulations & Season as Status Quo from 2023
 - A license for dog training on wild upland game birds was established in the 2023 legislature and a training season implemented by the Fish and Wildlife Commission
 - License is \$5 for residents and \$10 for nonresidents who use wild game birds for dog training
- Training season using wild game birds on public lands from August 1- March 31st for residents & August 15- March 31st for nonresidents. Training with wild game birds on public lands closed April 1- July 31st



Proposed UGB Regulations '24-'25

- Other proposed changes to Upland Game Bird Regulations include:
 - Region 1 beardless turkey tag per person purchase limit increased from 1 to 4
 - Adding hunting district boundary descriptions to UGB Regulations book
 - Changing language about Falconry license requirement to reduce confusion
- See coversheet for more details



Proposed UGB Regulation Amendments

- FWP worked with the Commission Chair on introducing 2 amendments to the proposed regulations that were introduced today:
 1. Adjust the Upland Game Bird season starting date for nonresidents from Sept. 1 to Sept. 15
 2. Adjust the starting date for bird dog training by nonresidents from Aug. 15 to Sept. 1
- These amendments are viewable at:
<https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/commission/february-2024-meeting>
Scroll down and click on the Amendments tab



R6 Game Bird Population & Hunting Data

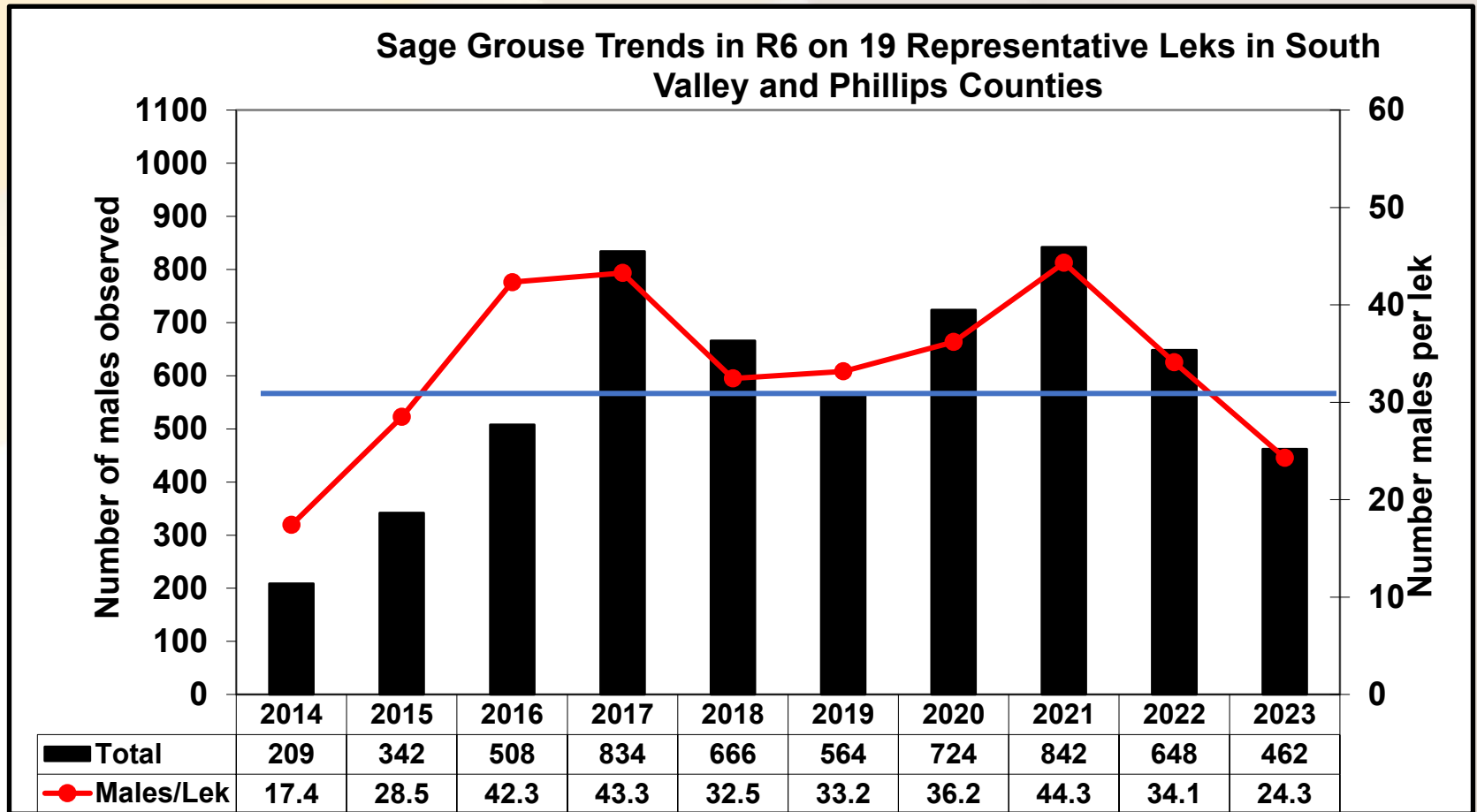


Region 6 Upland Bird Populations

- Sage Grouse
 - Spring 2023 average males per lek 26% down from 2022 and 36% below long-term average (LTA= 2004-2023)
 - AHM leks in Phillips and Valley Co averaged 24.3 males per lek in 2023, 29% lower than 2022 and 20% below LTA



Region 6 Upland Bird Populations



Blue line represents current LTA of 30.5 males/lek for AHM leks in Region 6



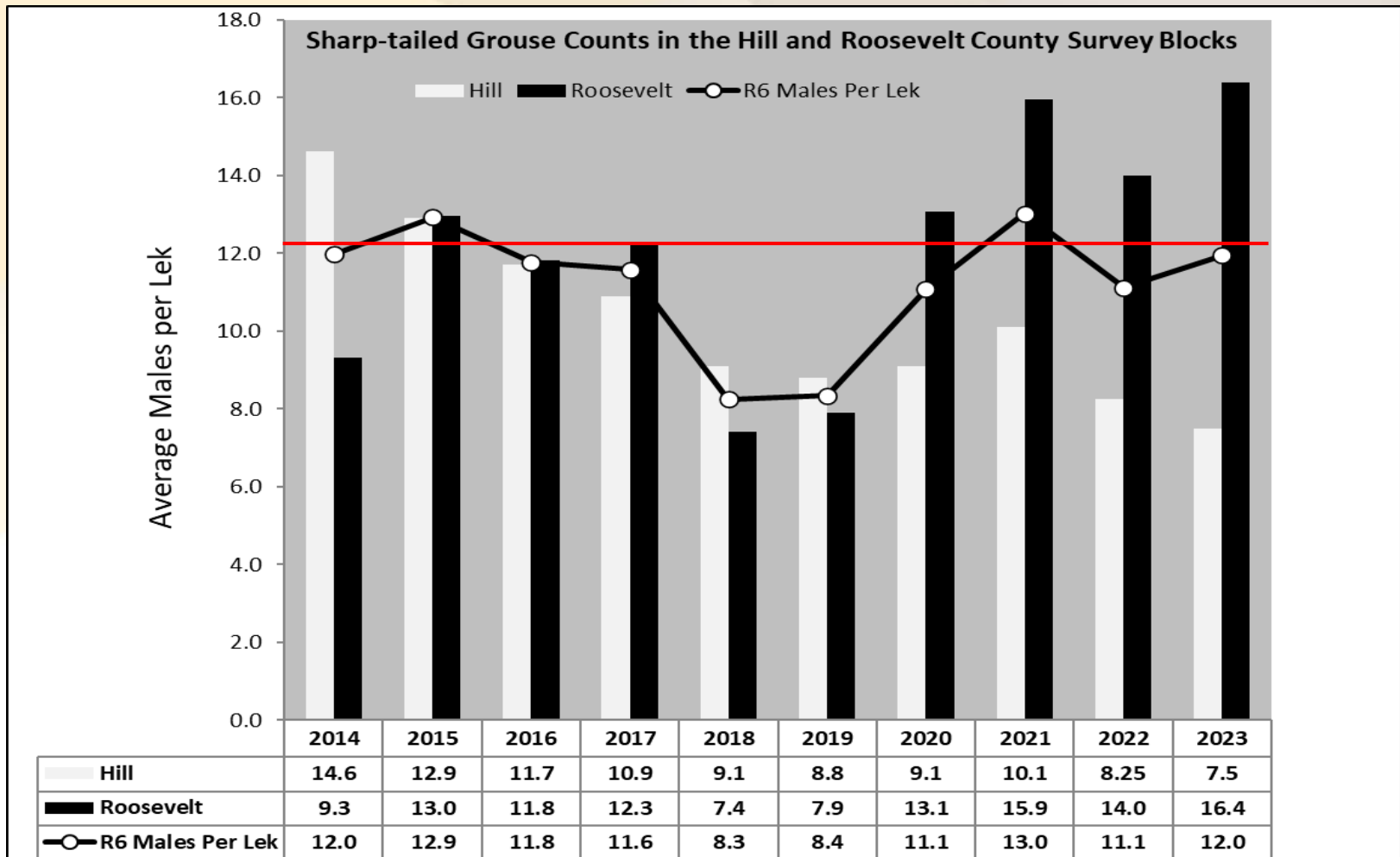
Region 6 Upland Bird Populations

- Sharp-tailed Grouse

- Eastern R6- spring 2023 counts were a 17% increase from 2022, 31% above LTA (LTA= 2001-2023)
- Western R6- spring 2023 count was a 9% drop from 2022, 37% below LTA
- This trend was the same from the 2021 to 2022 counts, improving in the east and falling in the west



Region 6 Upland Bird Populations

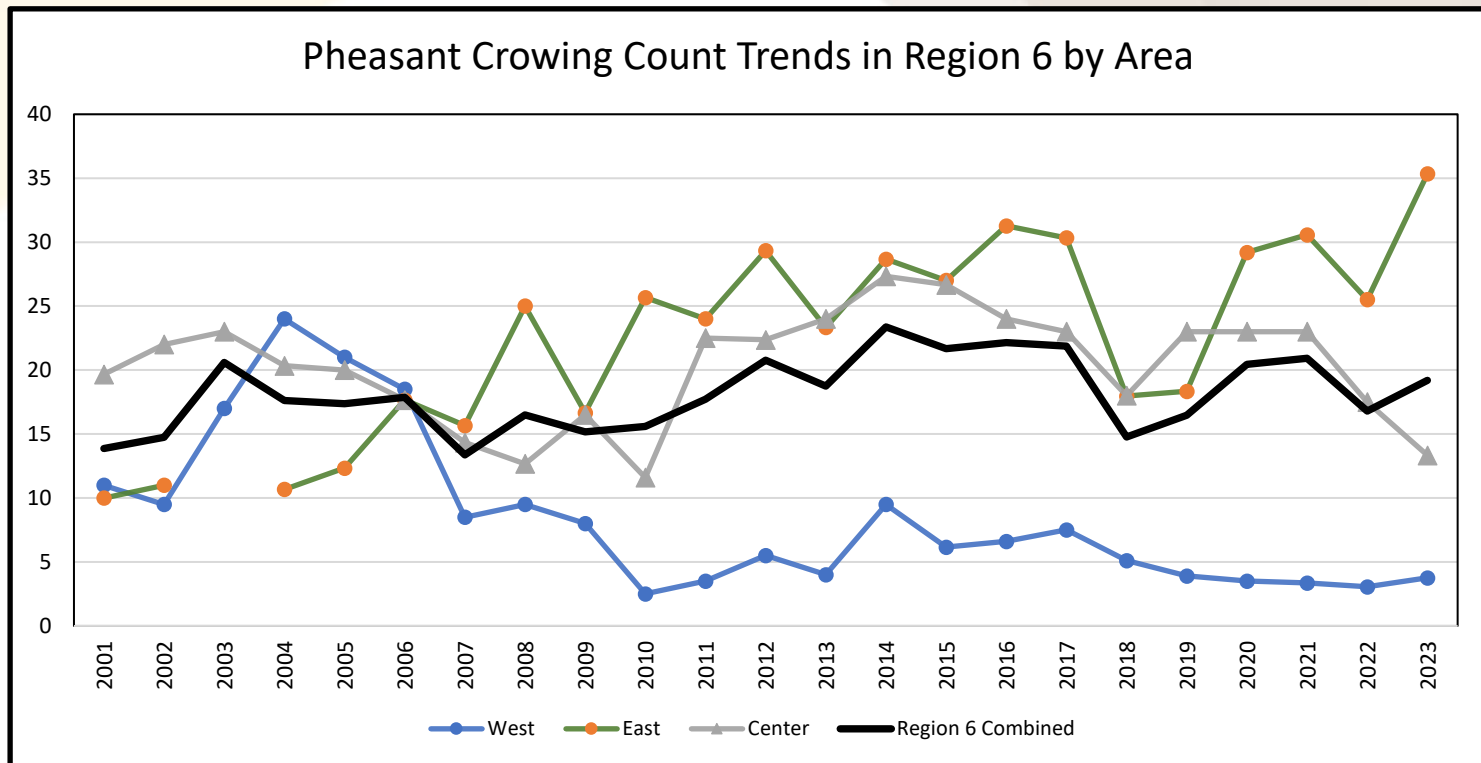


- Red line is current LTA of 12.3 males/lek



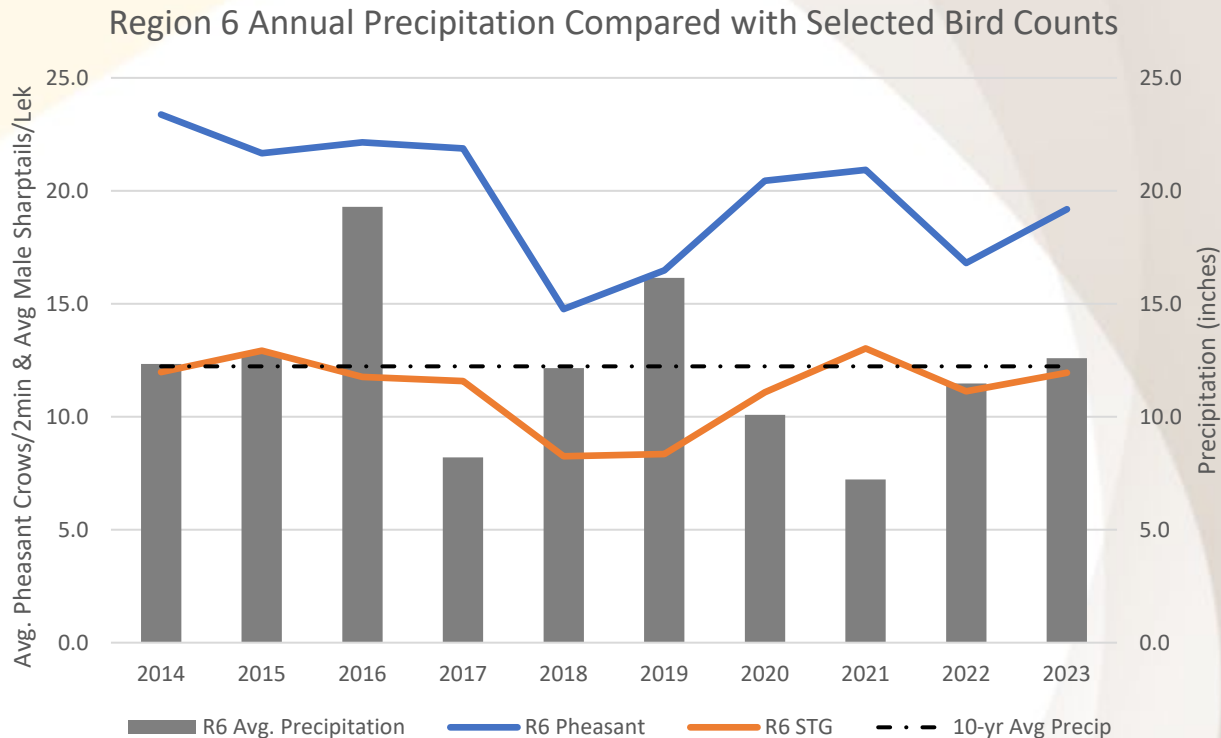
Region 6 Upland Bird Populations

- Ring-necked Pheasant
 - Spring crowing counts region wide averaged 14% increase over 2022 and 5% above LTA (2001-2023)

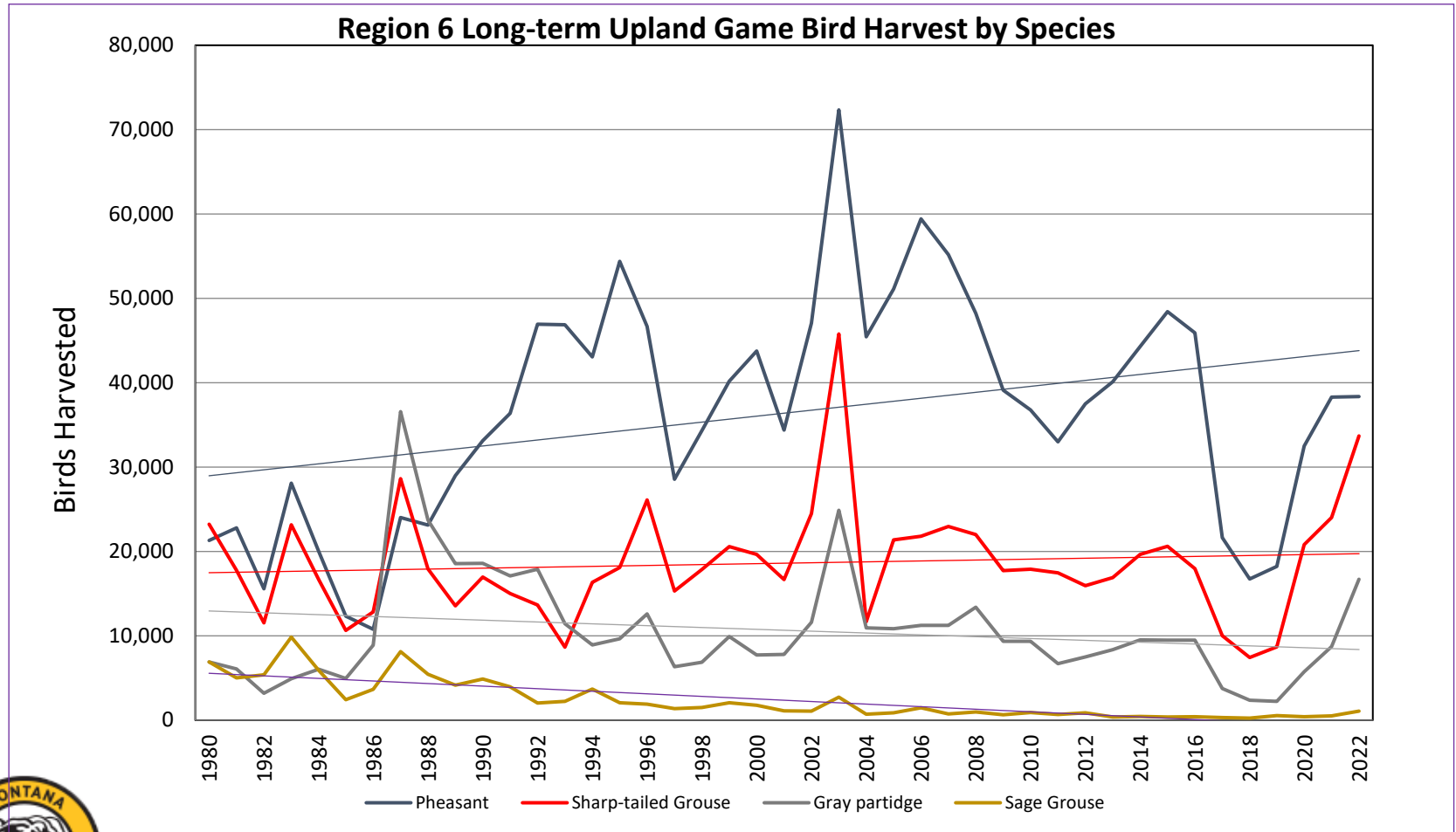


Region 6 Upland Bird Populations

- Annual population fluctuations are mostly driven by precipitation & resulting habitat conditions



Region 6 Bird Harvest



Region 6 Bird Harvest by Species

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Sage Grouse	461	371	400	318	263	544	404	515	1,068
Sharp-tailed Grouse	19,655	20,620	17,944	10,006	7,448	8,685	20,819	24,015	33,692
Pheasant	44,281	48,429	45,893	21,641	16,750	18,240	32,494	38,284	38,347
Gray Partridge	9,532	9,478	9,499	3,759	2,367	2,218	5,749	8,722	16,713



Region 6 Bird Harvest by Area

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	LTA
Region 6 East	50,575	49,847	53,261	21,245	19,192	18,414	41,246	54,523	72,575	40,774
Region 6 West	23,641	29,051	20,727	14,833	7,816	11,434	18,464	17,499	17,535	20,760
Total	74,216	78,898	73,988	36,078	27,008	29,848	59,709	72,022	90,110	71,326

*Harvest of all bird species combined

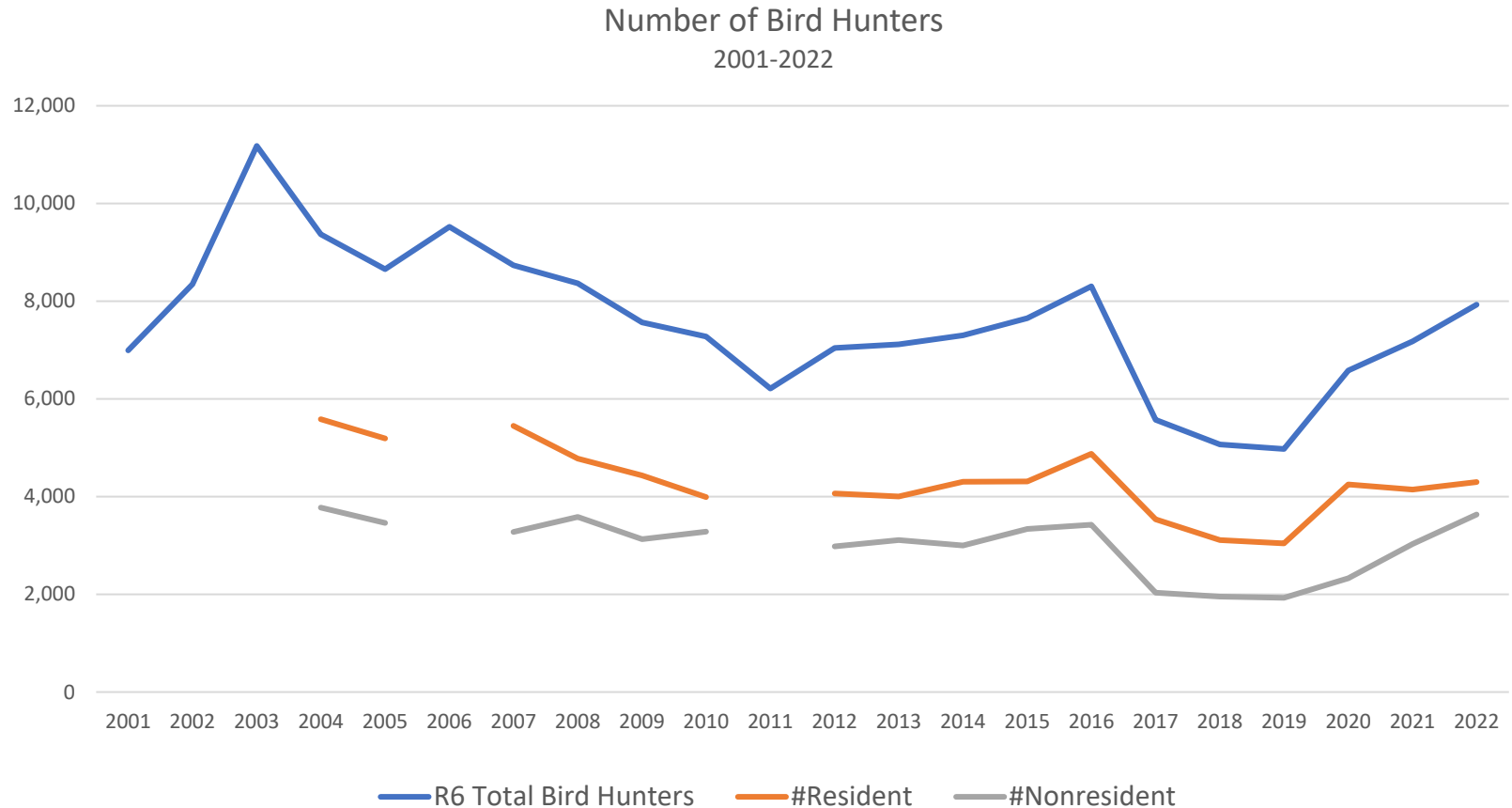


Region 6 Bird Hunter Participation

- Comprised of hunter numbers and hunter effort (i.e. hunter days)
- Most information comes from our annual telephone hunter harvest surveys
 - Surveys just starting for hunting season 2023
- Bird hunter participation & distribution tends to be related to bird numbers, plus some other influences



Region 6 Bird Hunter Numbers

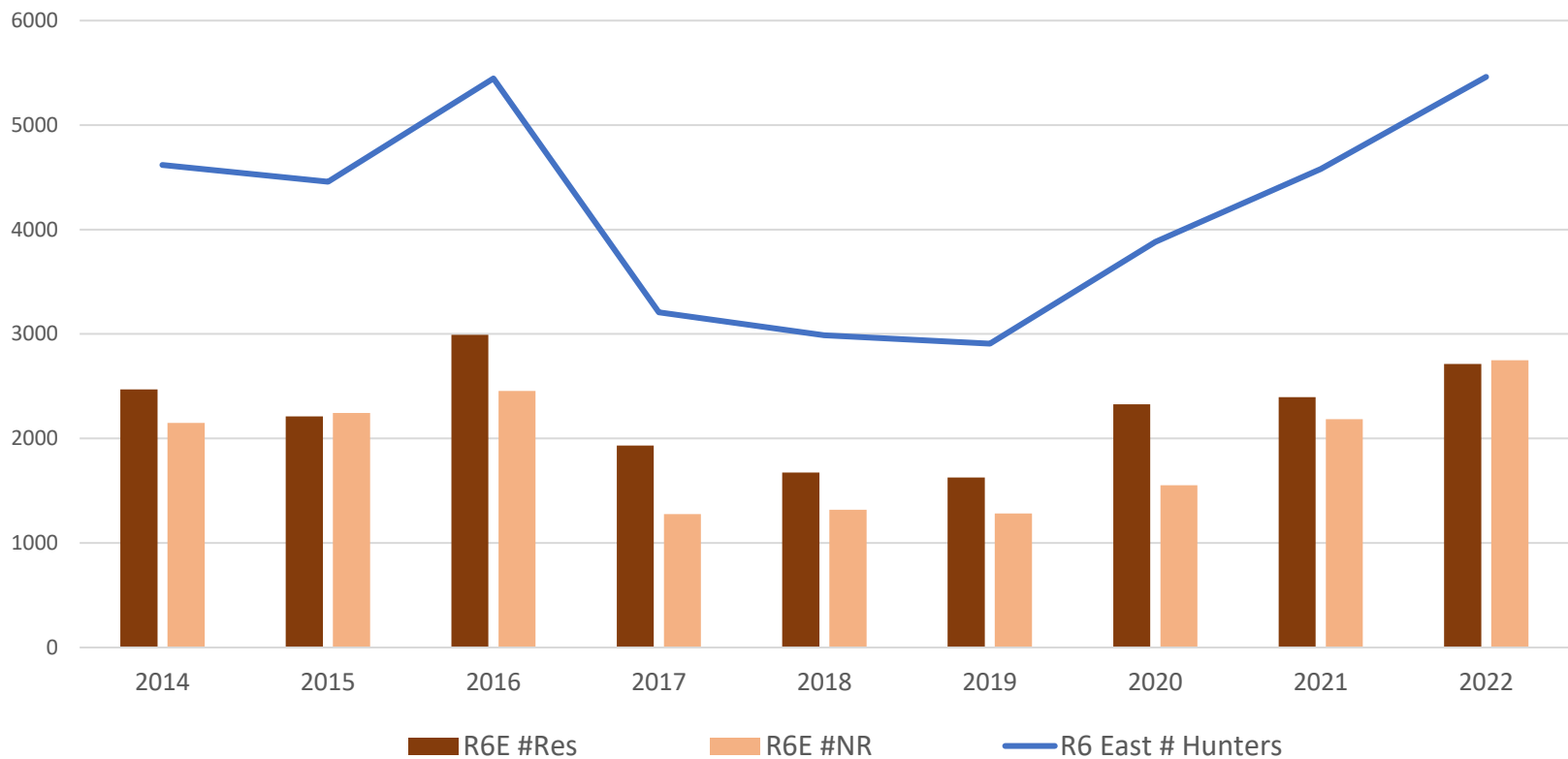


- Overall R6 bird hunter numbers have been declining since early 2000s, but rising in the last 3 years



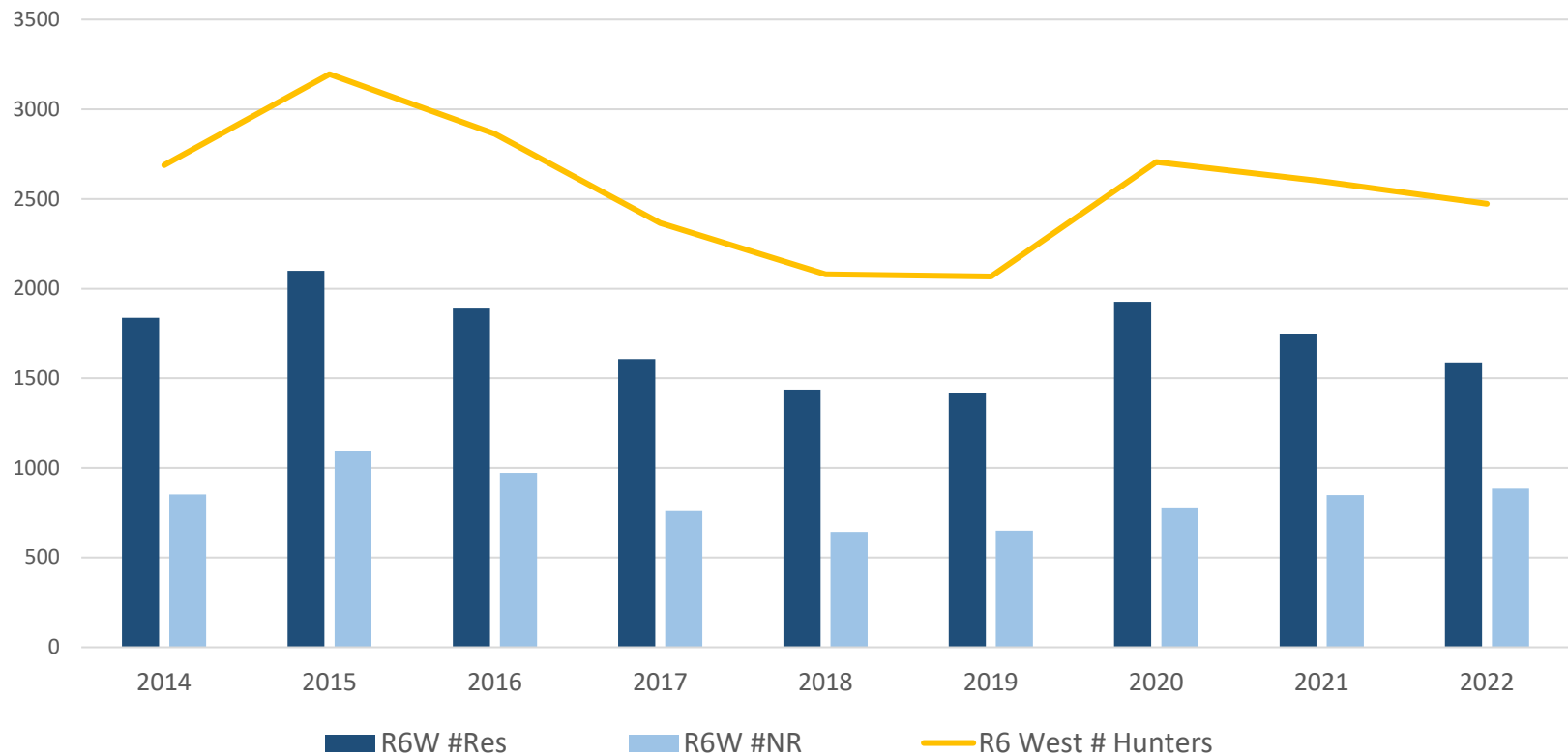
Region 6 Bird Hunter Numbers

Eastern Region 6 Bird Hunter Numbers and Residency



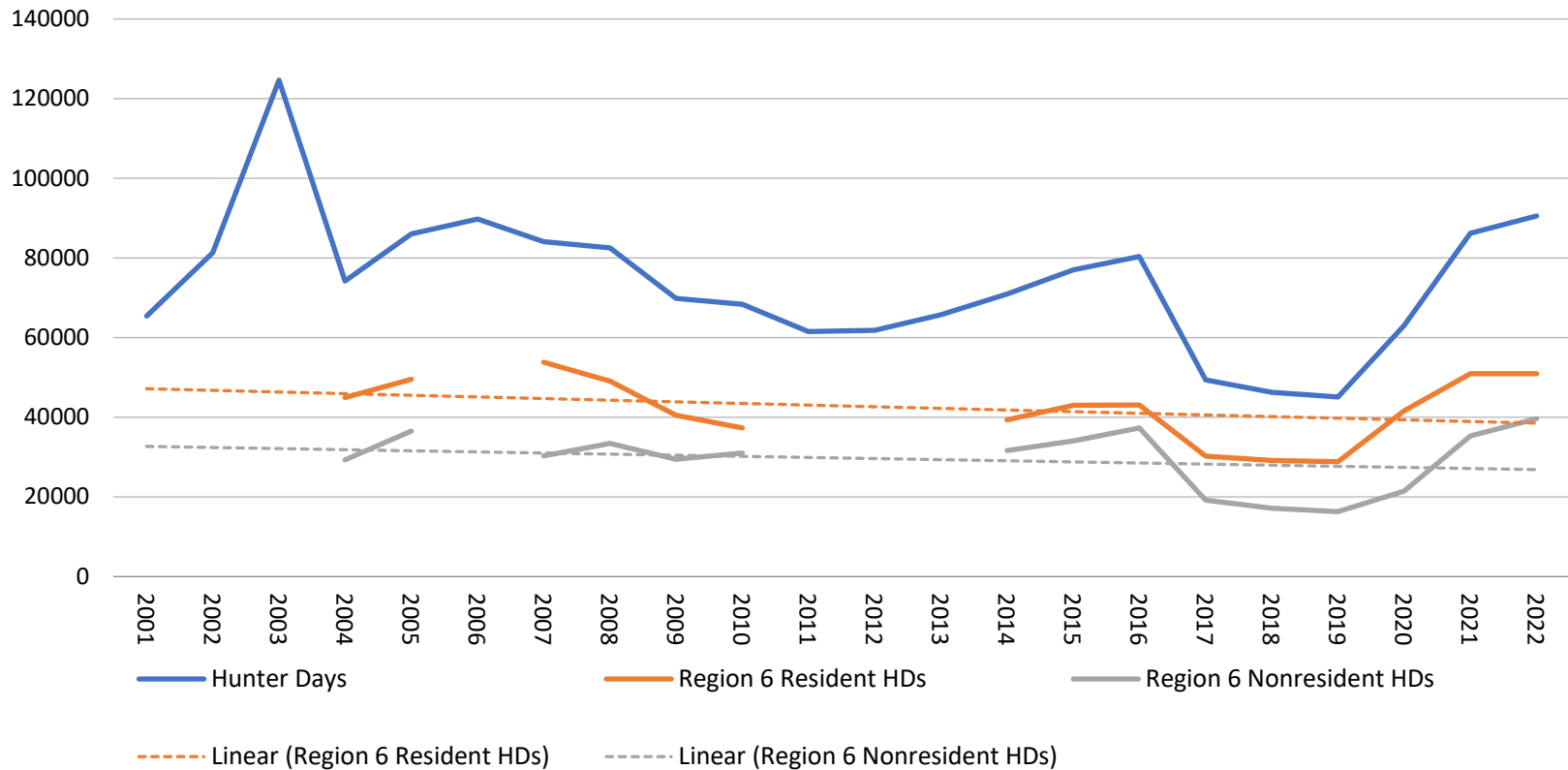
Region 6 Bird Hunter Numbers

Western Region 6 Bird Hunter Numbers and Residency



Region 6 Bird Hunter-Days (Effort)

Bird Hunter Days 2001-2022

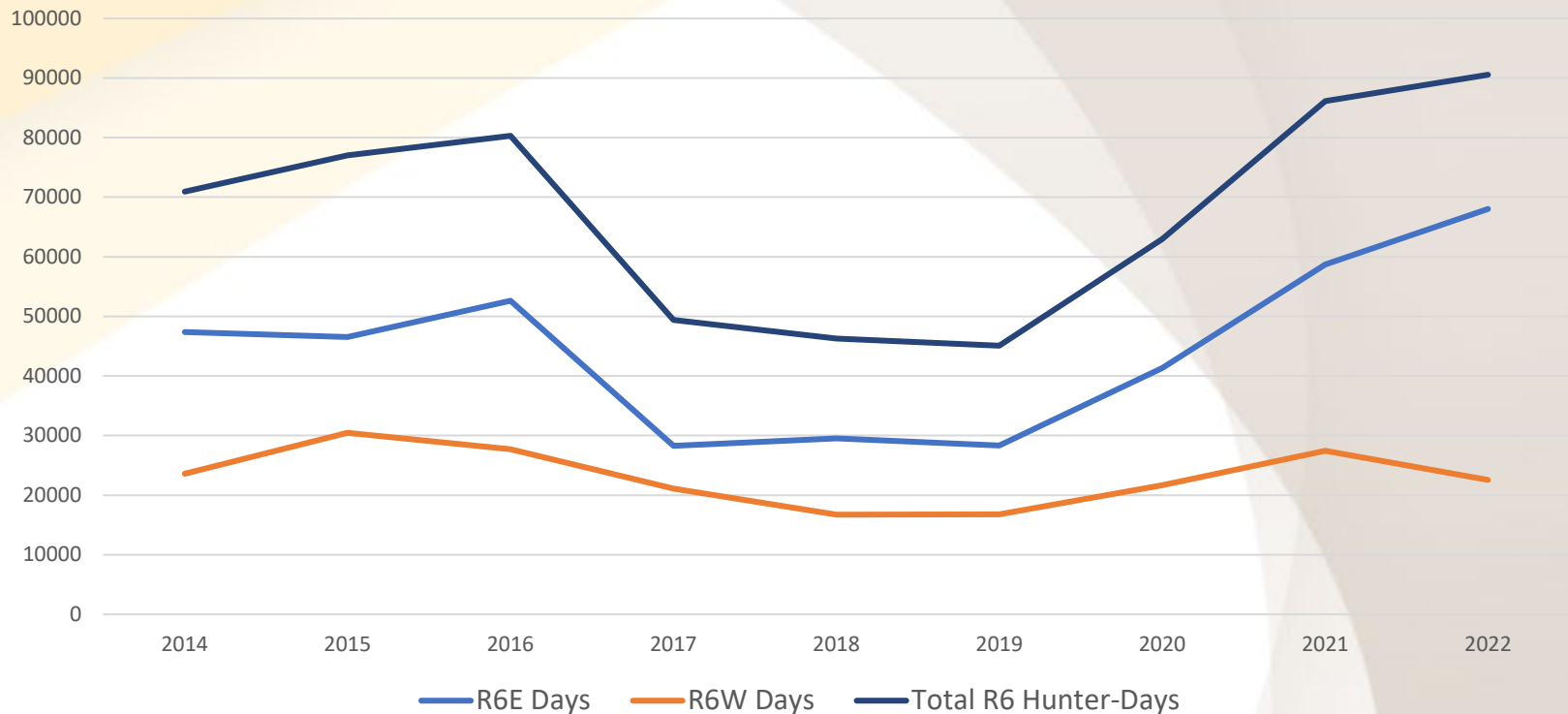


Bird hunter-days have also risen recently and show a similar trend for both residents and non-residents



Region 6 Bird Hunter-Days

Bird Hunter Days by Area 2014-2022



Similar to bird hunter numbers, past 3 years show rise in bird hunter days in the eastern half of Region 6, but not western R6.



Region 6 Bird Hunter-Days

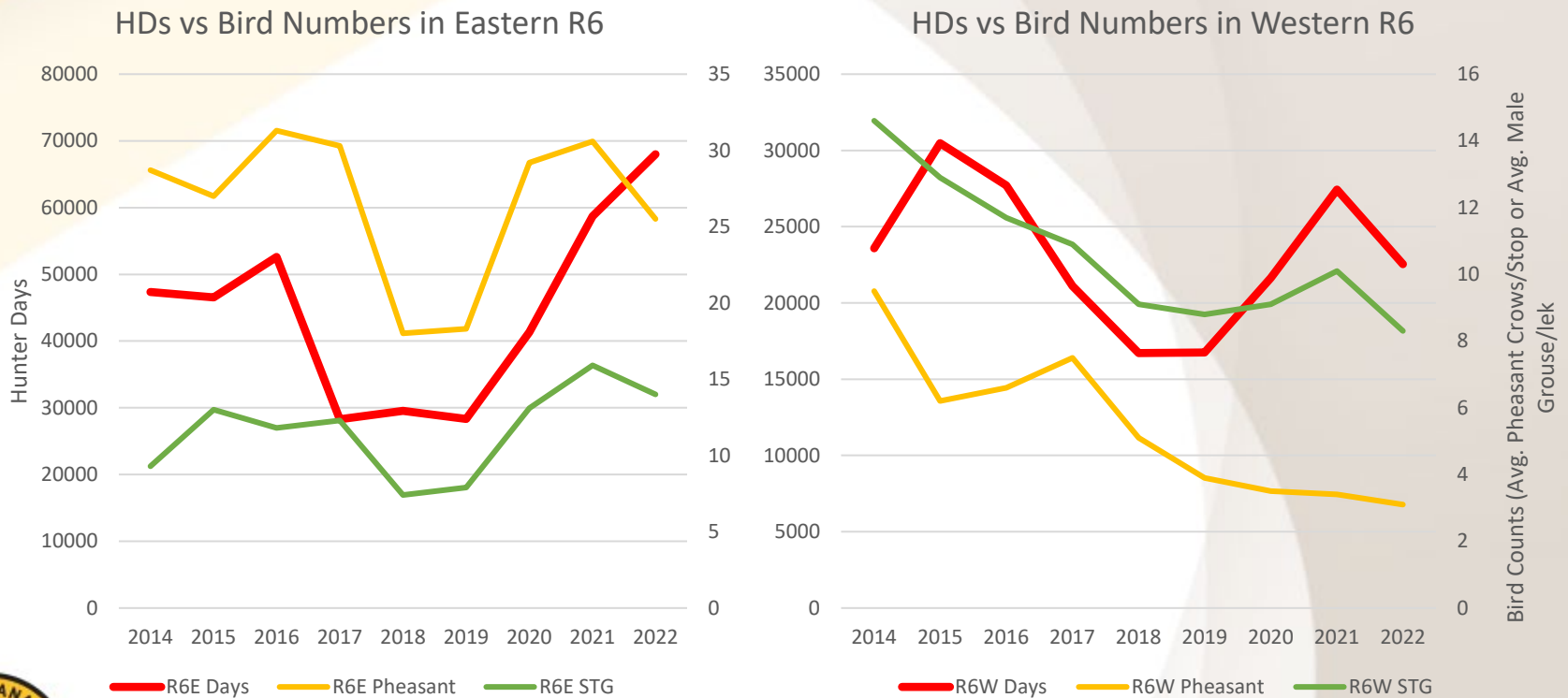
- Bird hunter-days in Region 6 rising is driven in part by individuals hunting more days per season:

Region 6 Number of Days per Bird Hunter									
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
R6 Days/Hunter	9.55	9.95	9.7	8.85	8.95	8.9	9.3	11.7	10.8
R6 East Days/Htr	10.3	10.4	9.7	8.8	9.9	9.7	10.6	12.8	12.5
R6 West Days/Htr	8.8	9.5	9.7	8.9	8	8.1	8	10.6	9.1
R6 East Resident	9.6	10	9	8.1	9.9	10.1	11.3	13	13.2
R6 East NR	11	10.9	10.5	10	9.9	9.3	9.6	12.7	11.7
R6 West Resident	8.5	10	8.6	9.1	8.8	8.7	7.9	11.4	9.5
R6 West NR	9.3	8.7	11.8	8.5	6.3	6.7	8.3	8.9	8.5



R6 Bird Hunting Participation

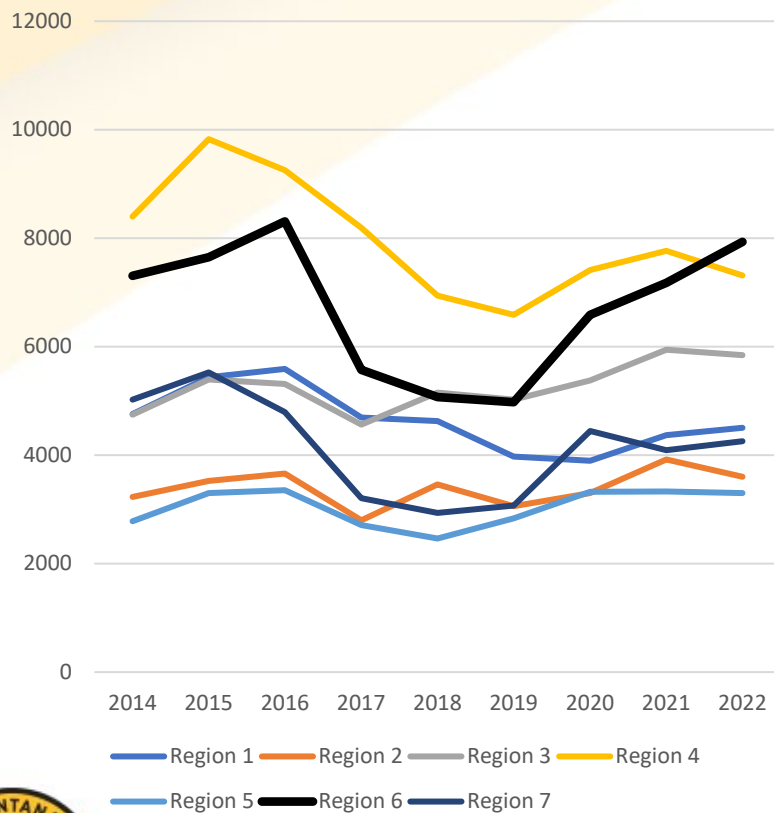
- Bird hunter-day distribution within the region is correlated with observed bird numbers during annual surveys



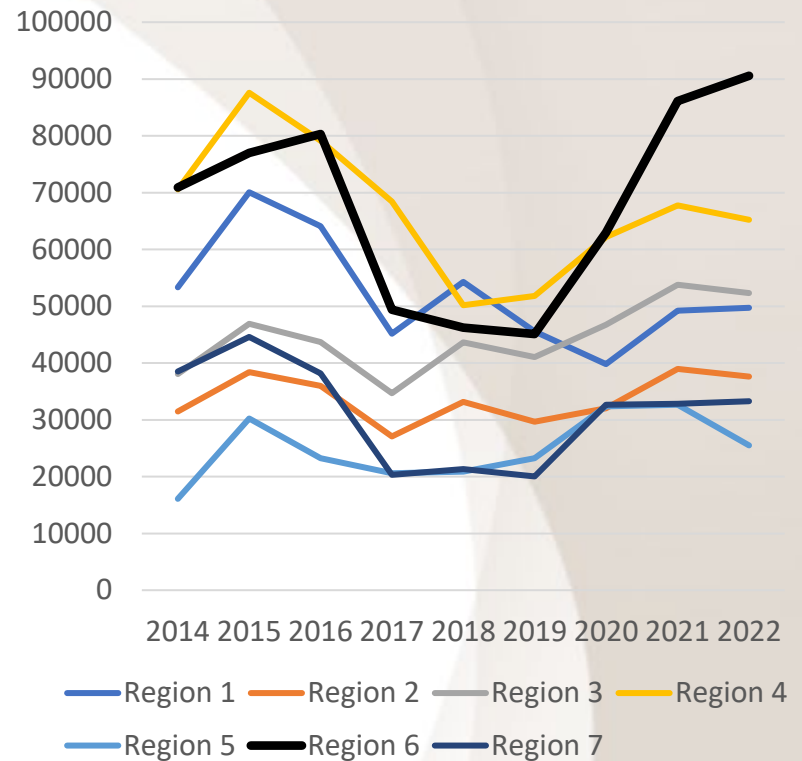
MT Bird Hunting Participation

Region 6 does appear to be bearing most of the rise in bird hunting compared with other FWP Regions

MT Bird Hunters by Region 2014-2022



MT Bird Hunter-Days by Region 2014-2022



Hunter Participation- 2023 Preview

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE, & PARKS

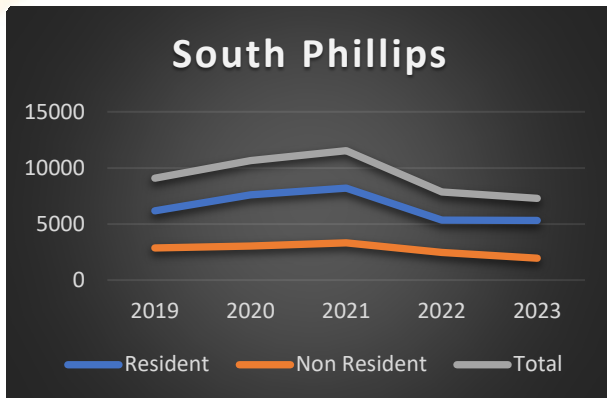
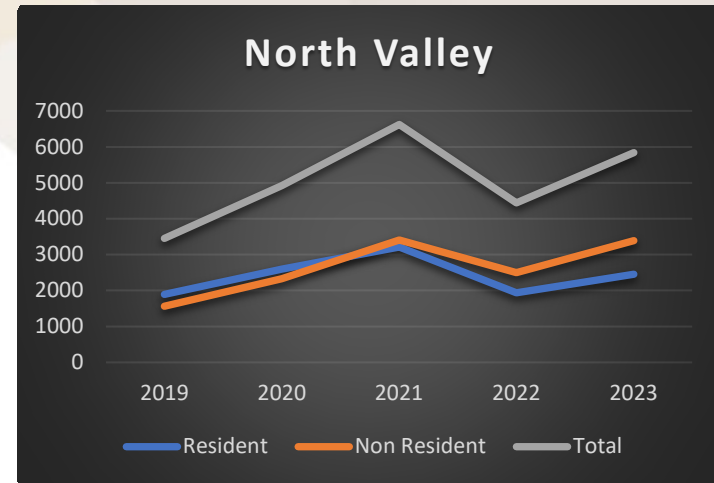
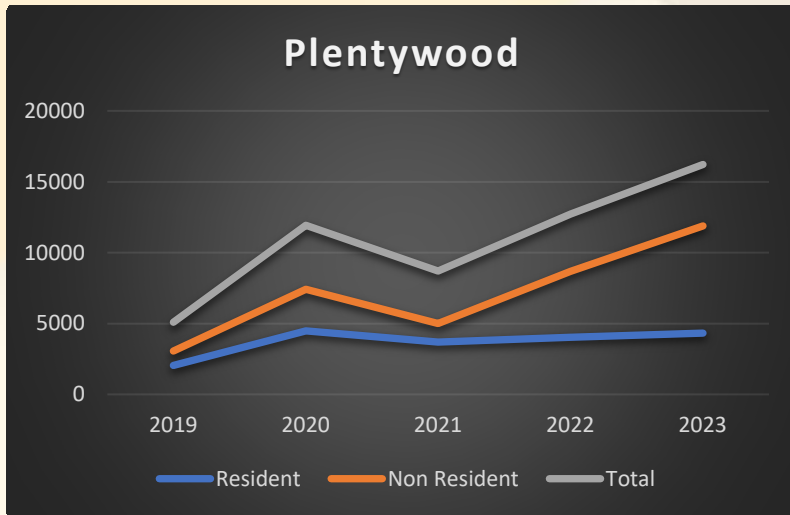
10-YEAR LICENSE SALES UPLAND BIRD
Combo Licenses Not Shown for Clarity

LICENSE TYPE	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Res. Bird	26,820	26,417	28,105	24,131	21,259	19,642	18,341	20,535	19,047	18,736	19,512
Res. Senior/Youth/Disabled Bird	1,299	1,289	1,533	12,733	11,658	10,721	10,067	10,894	10,614	10,434	10,760
Total Resident Upland Bird Season	77,802	78,182	79,171	97,668	95,506	93,334	93,160	99,963	106,999	107,129	111,187
Nonres. Bird	5,144	5,215	5,590	5,419	4,318	4,213	4,328	5,328	6,291	6,792	8,001
Nonres. Bird - Youth	161	186	211	188	137	103	94	180	163	178	198
Total Nonresident Upland Bird Season	32,935	33,294	35,521	36,314	35,018	35,857	36,988	37,735	39,304	38,283	41,076
Nonres. 3-Day Bird Stamp	1,911	1,989	2,432	2,539	2,200	2,112	2,007	2,356	2,869	3,035	3,491
Grand Totals	113,155	113,944	117,645	137,026	133,197	131,808	132,586	140,463	149,755	148,986	156,251

- Bird license sales increased for both residents and non-residents from 2022 to 2023



Hunter Participation- 2023 Preview



- Preliminary R6 BMA data indicates NR increases in hunter-days in eastern R6 *(includes big game hunters)



Dog Training Season Survey

- ~300 resident and ~100 nonresident training licenses were sold in 2023
- A survey of dog training license holders is being conducted now
 - Survey questions include where, how long, whether training was commercial or non-commercial, # of dogs trained, and landownership where training occurred



Discussion

- Feedback on the proposed regulations for 2024 & 2025, the two new amendments, or other observations related to bird hunting in Region 6?



Formal Public Comment

- To submit formal comments to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for the upcoming February 16th meeting, visit:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/commission/february-2024-meeting>

and select the topic you'd like to comment on

- Comments for the Feb 16th meeting are due by **January 31st**
- Visit <https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/commission> for more information about commission meetings and how to watch or participate during the meeting





Thank you!

