The Nevada Department of Wildlife was able to conduct aerial chukar density surveys in all 13 transects established in northern Nevada (see Figure on opposite page) during the week of August 15-18, 2016. Funding for these surveys was made available through the Nevada Chukar Foundation. Results of the survey were largely mixed with seven transects reporting an increase in observed birds per square mile while six transects saw declines. The most significant decline was apparent in the Santa Rosa transect with a 66% decline from 2015. Lesser declines were observed in the Pine Forest, Sonoma, Izzenhood, Rock Creek and Granites transects. Alternatively, notable increases were observed in the Argenta, Lava Beds, Sheep Creek and Double H transects. There seems to be some fairly drastic variation, even within specific areas, and mountain ranges adjacent to one another can have quite different results. Overall, results of the survey were positive with a 5% increase in observed birds per square mile compared to last year, and this year’s average is 28% greater than the long-term average.
An estimate of online small game survey questionnaires indicate that there were 43% fewer hunters that hunted chukar during the 2015-2016 season than in 2014-2015. This resulted in less overall harvest (approximately 60,000 birds) than the prior season, but the return on investment was the best since 2011 with 6.8 birds per hunter and 1.4 birds per day. With less hunting pressure, a fall that provided a good amount of green vegetation, a winter with greater overall snowpack than in recent years, a mild February that provided a reprieve from winter conditions and fairly abundant spring moisture, one would think that the table was set for a fantastic chukar production year. Unfortunately, that didn’t materialize across the board as we would have anticipated. However, there are still some bright spots that should peak the wing-shooter’s interest and overall, look for a bit better season than last year.

In conjunction with the aerial density surveys, some ground brood surveys were also conducted. Brood surveys conducted in Hunt Unit 041-042 documented 710 birds (this was the greatest number of birds observed since 2011 in this unit group) with a young per adult ratio of 3.5. Within this portion of Pershing County, hunters may want to try the Sahwave and Seven Troughs Ranges. Additionally, brood surveys were also conducted in Churchill County with positive results. A total of 534 birds were observed; composed of 504 young and 53 adults for a young per adult ratio of 9.5. This is considered a high recruitment ratio and should result in good to very good chukar hunting. Look to mountain ranges such as the Stillwater, Clan Alpine and Sand Springs to encounter good bird numbers early in the season.

Some large wildfires burned important chukar and other wildlife habitat during the summer of 2016, and it is likely that the fire season will continue into October unless there is a drastic change in the weather. The Izzenhood survey transect, and almost the entirety of the Izzenhood Range, burned in the 122,000 acre “Hot Pot” fire. Additionally, the Virginia Mountain fire complex burned some popular chukar hunting habitat during the summer of 2016 as well. Hunters may want to avoid these areas to enjoy a better experience and to decrease stress on various wildlife populations.