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2005 Colorado Small Game Walk-In Atlas



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WALK-IN PHEASANT SEASON
NOV. 12, 2005 - JAN. 16, 2006

2005 Walk-In Access Program

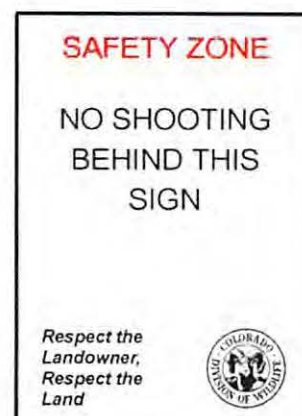
Eastern Colorado pheasant populations and habitat continue to recover from several years of severe drought, although further increases will take consistent spring and summer precipitation over multiple years, and a continued string of mild winters. The Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), working with nine local contractors, has obtained access to approximately 145,000 acres of pheasant cover throughout eastern Colorado. While this program is aimed at pheasants, there are local opportunities to hunt other small game species such as rabbits, bobwhite and scaled quail, coyotes and occasionally waterfowl. **Big game hunting permission is not included in the Walk-In Access Program, nor is access for mourning dove hunting.** To legally hunt small game on properties enrolled in the Walk-In Access Program, **hunters age 16 and older must first purchase, sign, and have in their possession a small game license and a Walk-In Access Program Permit.** Hunters under age 16 may hunt Walk-In Program lands without a permit. Permits are available for purchase for \$20 at all license vendors and CDOW offices. Proceeds from the sale of these permits go directly towards landowner payments, printing this atlas, and other operating costs of this program. **For 2005-06, access begins on the opening day of pheasant season, November 12th 2005, and continues through February 28th, 2006.** All regular hunting season dates must be adhered to when using Walk-In Access properties. **Access is not allowed to any Walk-In program lands after February 28, 2006** for any purpose, including dove hunting in September of 2006. Because the locations of enrolled cover changes from year to year, Walk-In Program Atlases and maps from previous years are not accurate for 2005. Beginning January 1, 2006, hunters must comply with **Habitat Stamp** regulations when hunting small game. Habitat stamps are not required to access Walk-In properties however, they are required to hunt small game in Colorado.

Typical habitats that were enrolled include CRP fields, wheat stubble, food plots, creek bottoms, and other areas that commonly hold pheasants and other small game. All fields enrolled in the program will be clearly marked at field corners along access points with Walk-In Access Program boundary signs. We have tried to make this atlas as complete and accurate as possible. However it is possible some errors in plotting fields went undetected, or some fields may have been withdrawn for a variety of reasons after the atlas was published. **Do not hunt on fields depicted in this atlas unless you also see Walk-In Access Program signs posted on the boundaries.** Examples of Walk-In signs are shown below. Updates and corrections to the maps will be posted on the CDOW web site (www.wildlife.state.co.us). Follow the links to the Walk-In Access Program page.

Participating groups: The Division was helped in this effort by nine nonprofit contractors who obtained access agreements from landowners, posted signs, and helped in other ways. These groups were the Centennial Conservation District (Sterling), Haxtun Conservation District, Sedgwick County Conservation District, the Washington County Conservation District, the Morgan County Chapter of Pheasants Forever, the West Yuma County Chamber of Commerce, the St. Charles Knights of Columbus (Stratton) and the Lamar and Baca County Chapters of Future Farmers of America. The Phillips County Chapter of Pheasants Forever and the Morgan County Conservation District contributed tremendously to this program.

Other Access Programs: Want additional access? It's available from private nonprofit groups for fees ranging from \$85-\$100. Contact the Burlington Rotary Club about their Rooster Roundup Program (719-346-5324 or www.roosterroundup.com), or the Akron Lions Club about their Flying Pheasants Program (970-345-2915 or www.akronflyingpheasants.org). Each program offers additional opportunities for pheasant hunting in Eastern Colorado.

Look for these signs at fields enrolled in the Walk-In hunting program:



Regulations pertaining to this program are:

In order to hunt small game on properties enrolled in the Walk-In Access Program, **hunters age 16 and older must first purchase, sign, and have in their possession both a small game license and a Walk-In Access Program Permit.** Hunters under age 16 may hunt without a Walk-In permit but must still have a small game license.

1. Public access is prohibited from 1 hour after sunset to 1 hour before sunrise.
2. Public access is prohibited prior to November 12th, 2005, and thereafter is permitted through the last day of February, 2006.
3. Access shall be by foot only. Entry by horseback, motorized vehicle, or other means is prohibited.
4. Access is permitted for hunting small game, waterfowl and furbearers only; all other activities are prohibited. Individuals may accompany hunters without obtaining or possessing a Walk-In Access permit provided they do not hunt.
5. Walk-In Access permits are not transferable to any other person, nor do they confer hunting privileges to any person other than the purchaser of the stamp.
6. Access is allowed to lands enrolled in the Walk-In Access Program only during established small game and furbearers seasons.

There are some other guidelines that, while not regulations, will contribute to the success of this program. Nothing will end this program quicker than landowner dissatisfaction.

- Where designated parking areas are established, use them. Don't block field access to farmers who may need to work other fields.
- Do pull completely off the gravel roads so grain trucks and other farm equipment can pass.
- Do not park along highways!
- Do not park in tall grassy or weedy areas where your catalytic converter can start them on fire. Don't smoke or extinguish cigarettes in these areas either, and make sure to completely extinguish cigarettes where you do smoke.
- Do not track down landowners who have enrolled ground in the program and try to get access to other fields. In most cases they have enrolled all of their eligible ground anyway, if they didn't enroll some fields it was for a reason; they may have cattle grazing crop stubble or they may be reserving it for family or close friends.
- Don't be afraid to ask other landowners for permission.
- Don't litter or clean harvested birds in Walk-In fields, or along roadsides. If someone else left a mess, pick it up!
- Don't shoot near or towards houses, farm buildings, or equipment.
- Don't worry if some enrolled lands don't appear to have good pheasant habitat. These are included or posted only to allow you access to other adjacent cover or to square off boundaries that were difficult to post with signs. Landowners are paid only for parcels that contain good pheasant habitat through the season.
- Don't hunt if cattle are in or adjacent to enrolled parcels.

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Department of Natural Resources
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(303) 297-1192
www.wildlife.state.co.us

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Photos: Ed Gorman
Text: Ed Gorman

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Director, Colorado Division of Wildlife: Bruce McCloskey

The Wildlife Commission sets small game seasons in July. Wildlife Commission members: Ed Gorman, chair; Ken Torres, secretary; Robert Bray, member; Rick Enstrom, member; Richard Ray, member; Robert Schoemaker, member; Russell George, ex-officio

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SMALL GAME HUNTING SEASONS

SMALL GAME REGULATIONS

Some small game regulations are included within this atlas for your convenience. A more complete synopsis of small game regulations is contained within the 2005 small game brochure, available at license agents, Division of Wildlife Offices, or on line at www.wildlife.state.co.us.

HUNTING HOURS

One-half hour before sunrise to sunset, except furbearers, which can be hunted from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. See Sunrise/Sunset chart below. Raccoons, coyotes, bobcats, striped skunks, beavers and red foxes can be hunted at night. See "Furbearer Methods of Take."

GUIDE TO LEGAL HUNTING HOURS

The table below is valid for Denver, CO, through 2005. SUBTRACT one minute from opening and closing time for each 12 1/2 miles east of Denver. ADD one minute to opening and closing time for each 12 1/2 miles west of Denver. The above changes are based on the assumption that each degree of longitude equals 50 miles and that a change of 1 degree of longitude equals 4 minutes change in sunrise and sunset times. Add one hour for Daylight Savings Time when in use.

Month	Sunrise/Sunset Table									
	SEPT.		OCT.		NOV.		DEC.		JAN.	
	Rise	Set	Rise	Set	Rise	Set	Rise	Set	Rise	Set
DAY	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
1	5:28	6:32	5:56	5:43	6:28	4:58	7:02	4:36	7:21	4:46
2	5:28	6:30	5:57	5:41	6:29	4:57	7:03	4:36	7:21	4:47
3	5:29	6:29	5:58	5:40	6:31	4:56	7:04	4:36	7:21	4:48
4	5:30	6:27	5:59	5:38	6:32	4:55	7:05	4:36	7:21	4:49
5	5:31	6:25	6:00	5:37	6:33	4:54	7:06	4:35	7:22	4:50
6	5:32	6:24	6:01	5:35	6:34	4:53	7:06	4:35	7:21	4:50
7	5:33	6:22	6:02	5:33	6:35	4:52	7:07	4:35	7:21	4:51
8	5:34	6:21	6:03	5:32	6:36	4:51	7:08	4:35	7:21	4:52
9	5:35	6:19	6:04	5:30	6:37	4:50	7:09	4:35	7:21	4:53
10	5:36	6:17	6:05	5:29	6:39	4:49	7:10	4:35	7:21	4:54
11	5:37	6:16	6:06	5:27	6:40	4:48	7:11	4:36	7:21	4:55
12	5:38	6:14	6:07	5:26	6:41	4:47	7:12	4:36	7:21	4:56
13	5:39	6:12	6:08	5:24	6:42	4:46	7:12	4:36	7:20	4:57
14	5:40	6:11	6:09	5:23	6:43	4:45	7:13	4:36	7:20	4:59
15	5:41	6:09	6:10	5:21	6:44	4:45	7:14	4:36	7:20	5:00
16	5:42	6:08	6:11	5:20	6:45	4:44	7:14	4:37	7:19	5:01
17	5:42	6:06	6:12	5:18	6:47	4:43	7:15	4:37	7:19	5:02
18	5:43	6:04	6:13	5:17	6:48	4:42	7:16	4:37	7:18	5:03
19	5:44	6:03	6:14	5:15	6:49	4:42	7:16	4:38	7:18	5:04
20	5:45	6:01	6:15	5:14	6:50	4:41	7:17	4:38	7:17	5:05
21	5:46	5:59	6:16	5:13	6:51	4:40	7:17	4:39	7:17	5:06
22	5:47	5:58	6:17	5:11	6:52	4:40	7:18	4:39	7:16	5:08
23	5:48	5:56	6:18	5:10	6:53	4:39	7:18	4:40	7:15	5:09
24	5:49	5:54	6:19	5:09	6:54	4:39	7:19	4:40	7:15	5:10
25	5:50	5:53	6:20	5:07	6:55	4:38	7:19	4:41	7:14	5:11
26	5:51	5:51	6:22	5:06	6:56	4:38	7:20	4:41	7:13	5:12
27	5:52	5:50	6:23	5:05	6:58	4:37	7:20	4:42	7:13	5:13
28	5:53	5:48	6:24	5:03	6:59	4:37	7:20	4:43	7:12	5:15
29	5:54	5:46	6:25	5:02	7:00	4:37	7:21	4:44	7:11	5:16
30	5:55	5:45	6:26	5:01	7:01	4:36	7:21	4:44	7:10	5:17
31			6:27	5:00			7:21	4:45	7:09	5:18

2005 LICENSE COSTS

	Resident	Nonresident
Walk-In Access Stamp.....	\$ 20.00	\$ 20.00
Small Game.....	\$ 15.25	\$ 40.25
Small Game (one-day).....	\$ 5.25	\$ 5.25
Comb. Small Game & Fishing.....	\$ 30.25	
Military w/60% or more disability....	free	
Fall Turkey.....	\$ 10.25	\$ 75.25
Furbearer.....	\$ 20.25	\$ 200.25
Youth Small Game, Furbearer & Fishing (Under 16).....	\$ 1.00	\$ 1.00

2006 LICENSE COSTS

	Resident	Nonresident
Walk-In Access Stamp.....	\$ 20.00	\$ 20.00
Small Game.....	\$ 21.00	\$ 56.00
Small Game (one-day).....	\$ 11.00	\$ 11.00
Comb. Small Game & Fishing.....	\$ 41.00	
Military w/60% or more disability....	free	
Fall Turkey.....	\$ 16.00	\$ 101.00
Furbearer.....	\$ 26.00	\$ 201.00
Youth Small Game, Furbearer & Fishing (Under 16).....	\$ 1.00	\$ 1.00

Costs include a 25-cent search and rescue fee, and a 75-cent surcharge for the Wildlife Management Education Fund.

Habitat Stamp.....	\$ 5.00	\$ 5.00
Annual maximum \$10.00; Lifetime \$200.00;		
Youth (18 & under) and Seniors (over 65) - free		

HARVEST INFORMATION PROGRAM (HIP)

Small game and waterfowl hunters and falconers must sign up with the Harvest Information Program (HIP) before their licenses are valid. Hunters must write the HIP number in the space provided on the license stamp. Those hunters who obtain licenses through the New Licensing System will have their HIP number printed on the license. Hunters will be asked basic information about their hunting, including how many birds they harvested the previous season and what species they plan to hunt this year. Both the phone line and web site run 24 hours a day, every day, and the process takes 3-8 minutes. If you signed up with HIP for the 2005-2006 hunting seasons and you intend to hunt from January through March 2006, you must buy a 2006 small game hunting license. Please make sure the 2005-2006 HIP number is on the 2006 license. If you don't have a 2005-2006 HIP number, please get one before hunting. To sign up for HIP Hunters need to call **1-866-265-6447 (1-866-COLOHIP)** or go on-line at www.colohip.com. For help getting your HIP number, call **1-800-368-4683**, Monday-Saturday, 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. MST.

SMALL GAME HUNTING SEASONS

SMALL GAME SEASONS

PHEASANT

1. Dates: Nov. 12 - Jan. 16, 2006

Areas: Units east of I-25

2. Dates: Nov. 12 - Jan. 2, 2006

Areas: Units west of I-25

Daily bag limit: 3 cocks.

Possession limit: 9 cocks.

BOBWHITE, GAMBEL'S & SCALED QUAIL

1. Dates: Nov. 12 - Jan. 2, 2006

Areas: Units east of I-25 and north of I-70 from I-25 east to Byers and Hwy. 36 from Byers to Kansas

2. Dates: Nov. 12 - Jan. 16, 2006

Areas: Units east of I-25 and south of I-70 from I-25 to Byers and Hwy. 36 from Byers to Kansas

3. Dates: Nov. 12 - Jan. 2, 2006

Areas: Units west of I-25

Daily bag limit: 8 of each species.

Possession limit: 24 of each species.

COTTONTAILS, SNOWSHOE HARE, WHITE-TAILED & BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBITS

Dates: Oct. 1, 2005 - Feb. 28, 2006

Areas: Statewide

Daily bag limit: 10 cottontails, 10 snowshoe hares, 10 jackrabbits

Possession limit: 20 cottontails, 20 snowshoe hares, 20 jackrabbits

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION REQUIRED

A fully feathered wing or head must be attached to all birds in transit to hunter's home or commercial processor. **For pheasants, a foot with visible spur can be substituted.**

HUNTERS PLEASE NOTE:

PLAINS SHARP-TAILED GROUSE may occupy some Walk-In properties in Weld, northern Morgan, and western Logan counties. Plains sharp-tailed grouse are not a legal game bird in Colorado. When hunting in these areas, please take special care to clearly identify the target before shooting.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Division of Wildlife Headquarters
6060 Broadway
Denver, CO 80216
(303) 297-1192

Northeast Region Service Center
6060 Broadway
Denver, CO 80216
(303) 291-7227

Northwest Region Service Center
711 Independent Ave.
Grand Junction, CO 81505
(970) 255-6100

Southeast Region Service Center
4255 Sinton Road
Colorado Springs, CO 80907
(719) 227-5200

Southwest Region Service Center
151 East 16th St.
Durango, CO 81301
(970) 247-0855

Fort Collins Service Center
317 W. Prospect Ave.
Fort Collins, CO 80526
(970) 472-4300

DOW numbers for recordings on season dates and other information (area code 303):

Deer, Elk, Antelope	291-7529
Fishing	291-7533
Small Game	291-7546
Turkey	291-7547
Waterfowl	291-7548
Hunter Education	291-7530
Mobility Impaired Licenses	291-7528

For a list of recorded information, call 297-1192.

www.wildlife.state.co.us

Pheasant and Quail Harvest Estimates

2003-04 birds/hunter/day

2004-05 birds/hunter/day

<u>County</u>	<u>Pheasant</u>	<u>Bobwhite Quail</u>	<u>Scaled Quail</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Pheasant</u>	<u>Bobwhite Quail</u>	<u>Scaled Quail</u>
Adams	0.4	na	na	Adams	0.5	na	na
Baca	1.0	1.1	2.1	Baca	0.6	1	1.2
Bent	0.2	0.2	1.4	Bent	0.4	0.6	0.6
Cheyenne	0.7	na	na	Cheyenne	0.6	na	1
Crowley	0.6	3.4	4.5	Crowley	0.6	3	1.7
Kiowa	0.9	1.2	4.4	Kiowa	0.5	0.3	1.3
Kit Carson	0.6	0.4	na	Kit Carson	0.8	0.5	na
Lincoln	1.4	na	3.1	Lincoln	0.9	na	na
Logan	0.5	1.0	na	Logan	0.4	1.3	na
Morgan	0.6	0.5	na	Morgan	0.3	0.4	na
Otero	0.2	0.4	1.0	Otero	0.5	1.3	1.3
Phillips	0.6	0.3	na	Phillips	0.6	0.3	na
Prowers	0.7	0.7	1.3	Prowers	0.6	1.9	1.7
Sedgwick	0.5	1.9	na	Sedgwick	0.5	0.8	na
Washington	0.4	0.6	na	Washington	0.5	na	na
Weld	0.5	na	na	Weld	0.3	na	na
Yuma	0.7	0.4	na	Yuma	0.6	0.6	na

Top Five Counties for Harvest of Pheasant, Bobwhite and Scaled Quail, 2003-04 and 2004-05 Seasons

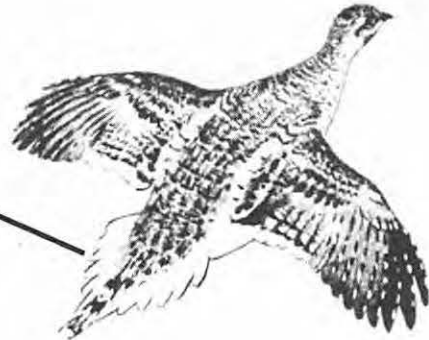
2003-04 Harvest

2004-05 Harvest

<u>Pheasant</u>		<u>Bobwhite Quail</u>		<u>Scaled Quail</u>		<u>Pheasant</u>		<u>Bobwhite Quail</u>		<u>Scaled Quail</u>	
Yuma	10,232	Logan	1,922	Baca	3,541	Yuma	10,755	Logan	1,756	Baca	1,902
Phillips	5,289	Baca	1,734	Pueblo	997	Phillips	4,975	Baca	1,445	Pueblo	1,646
Logan	4,769	Sedgwick	1,142	Bent	838	Logan	4,481	Prowers	805	Prowers	1,189
Prowers	3,685	Washington	997	Otero	809	Kit Carson	3,219	Morgan	768	Kiowa	988
Kit Carson	3,512	Morgan	882	Prowers	549	Washington	3,091	Yuma	732	El Paso	915

HUNTERS PLEASE NOTE: PLAINS SHARP-TAILED GROUSE may occupy some Walk-In properties in Weld, northern Morgan, and western Logan counties. Plains sharp-tailed grouse are not a legal game bird in Colorado. When hunting in these areas, please take special care to clearly identify the target before shooting.

Sharp-tailed grouse are much lighter in color than cock pheasants and have a **short**, distinctly pointed tail, visible at close range which shows white when in flight



As the Walk-In Program begins its 5th season, the Colorado Division of Wildlife would like to recognize contributors to the Walk-In Program:



Phillips County Pheasants Forever

Yuma County Pheasants Forever

Northeast Colorado Pheasants Forever

High Plains Land Conservancy

Natural Resources Conservation Service Offices in Walk-In Counties

Reading the Maps

In this Walk-In Atlas, lands enrolled in the Walk-In Access Program are colored in **YELLOW**. These designated lands are open to hunters holding a current Walk-In Stamp in addition to their small game license. All lands colored in **WHITE** require permission from the landowner before hunting.

Do not hunt on fields depicted in this atlas unless you also see Walk-In Access Program signs posted on the boundaries

- W** A property enrolled in the Walk-In Program having wheat - usually harvested wheat stubble - as its cover type.
- G** A property enrolled in the Walk-In Program having some type of grass as its cover type. Typically, this property is also enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).
- C** A property enrolled in the Walk-In Program having corn - usually harvested corn - as its cover type.
- O** A Walk-In property having "other" types of cover, e.g. creek bottom, tree rows, food plot, CRP cover crop, etc. as its cover type.
- G** A Walk-In property having an irrigated pivot circle with grass cover type in the four corners. The pivot circle land is NOT open for Walk-In hunting.
- W G** A Walk-In property having both wheat and grass as cover types, for example.
- O** An irregularly shaped Walk-In property having "other" cover types, e.g. an L-shaped habitat planting or a tree-row windbreak.



Paved Highway



Secondary Roads
(may be paved or gravel)



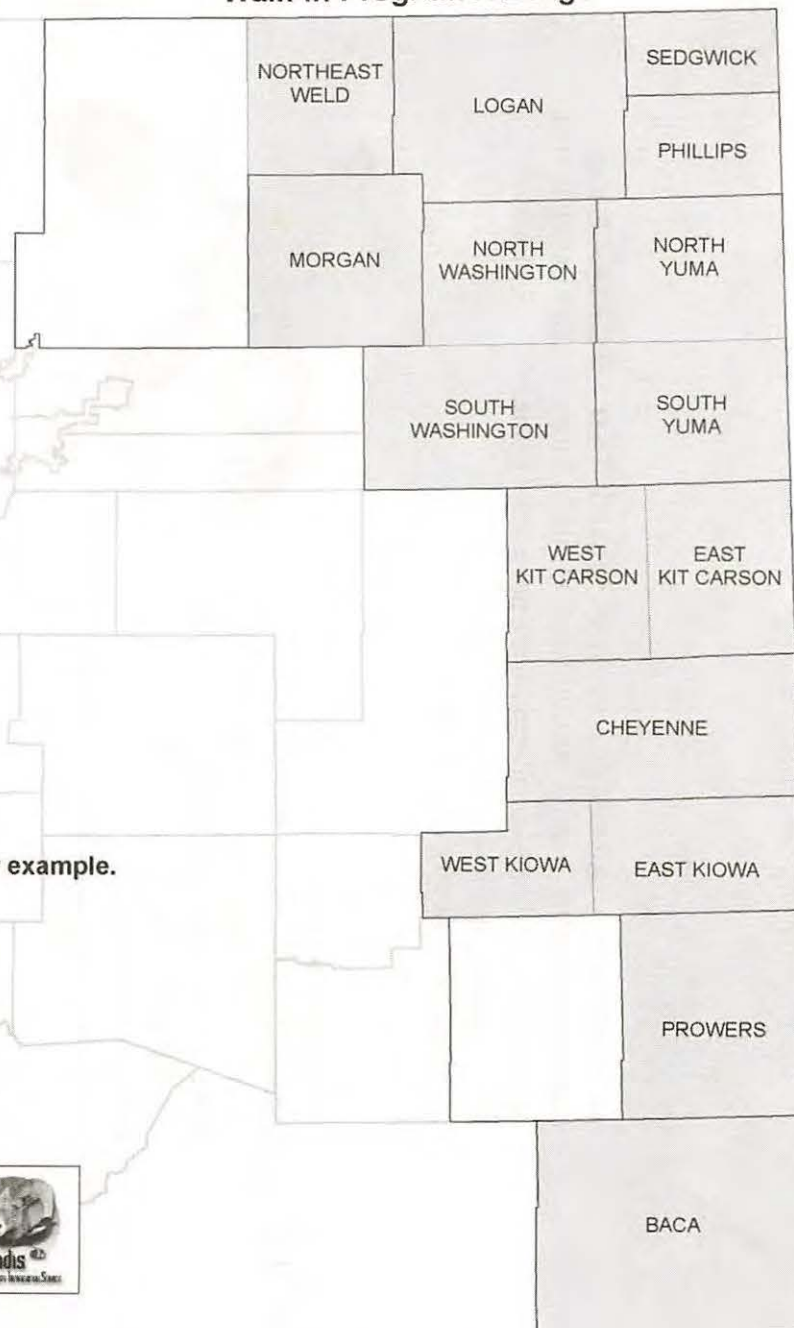
Local Roads
(gravel county roads)

123

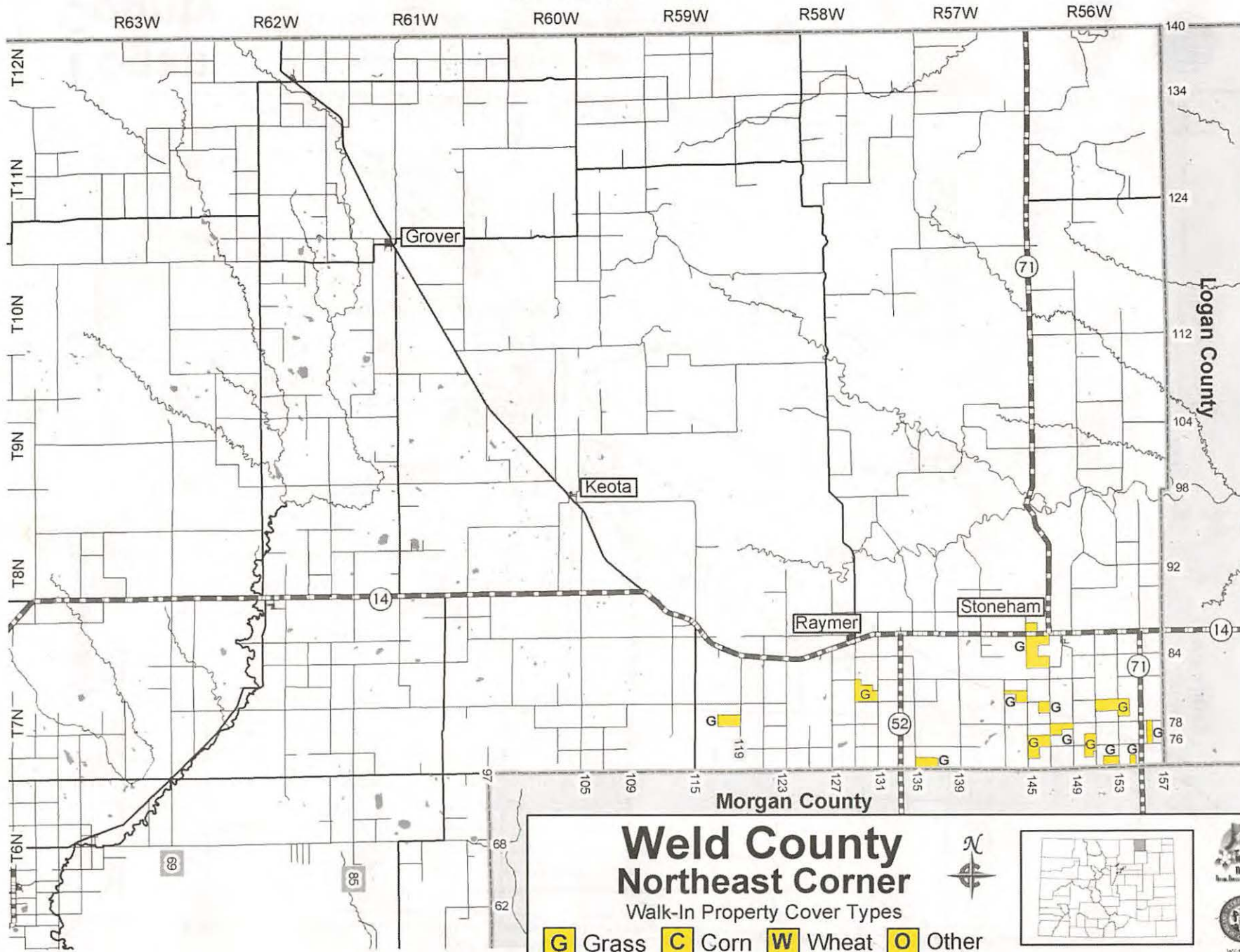
County road number



Counties with Walk-In Program Acreage



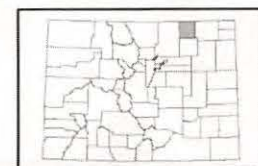
Nebraska

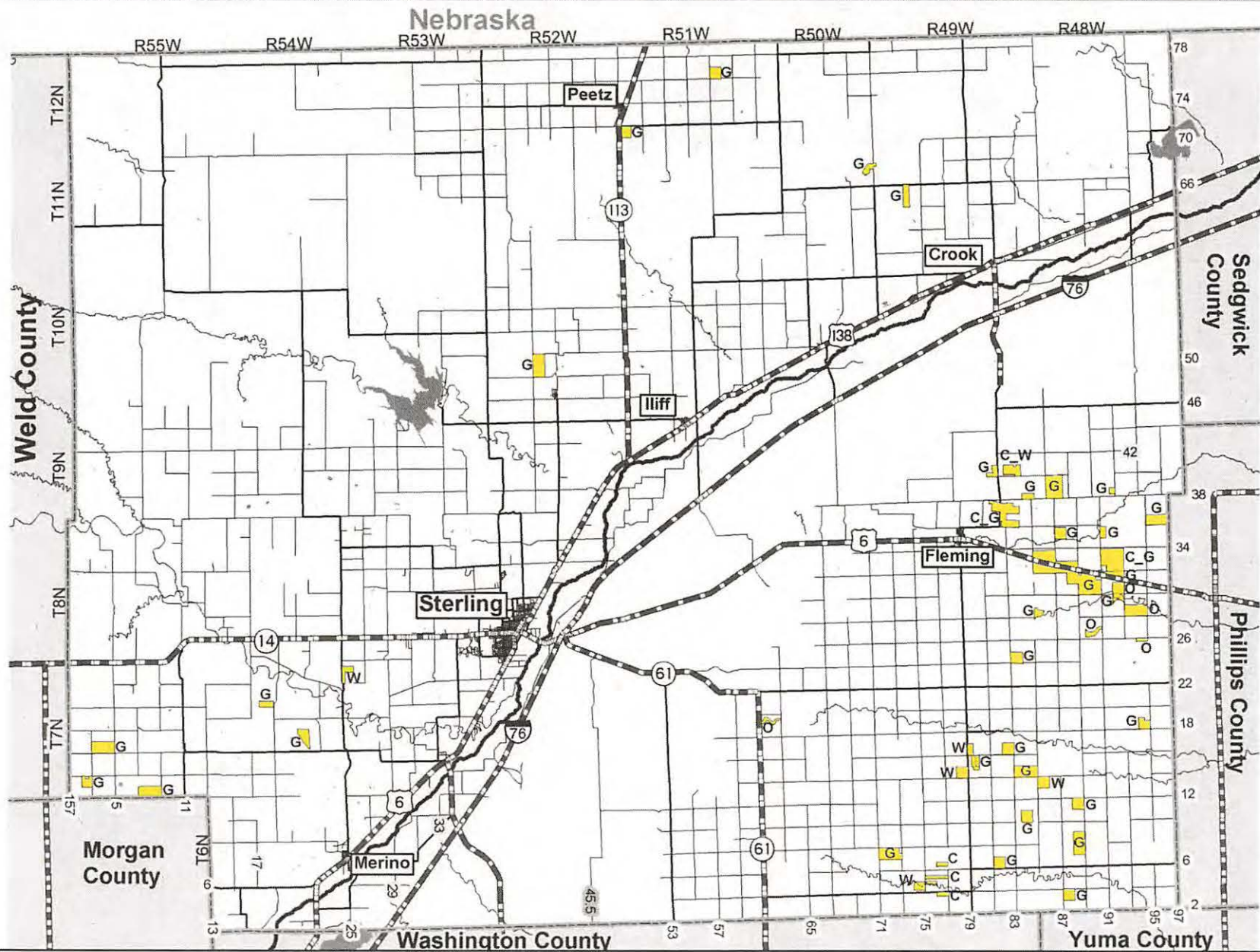


Weld County Northeast Corner

Walk-In Property Cover Types

G Grass **C** Corn **W** Wheat **O** Other

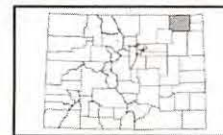




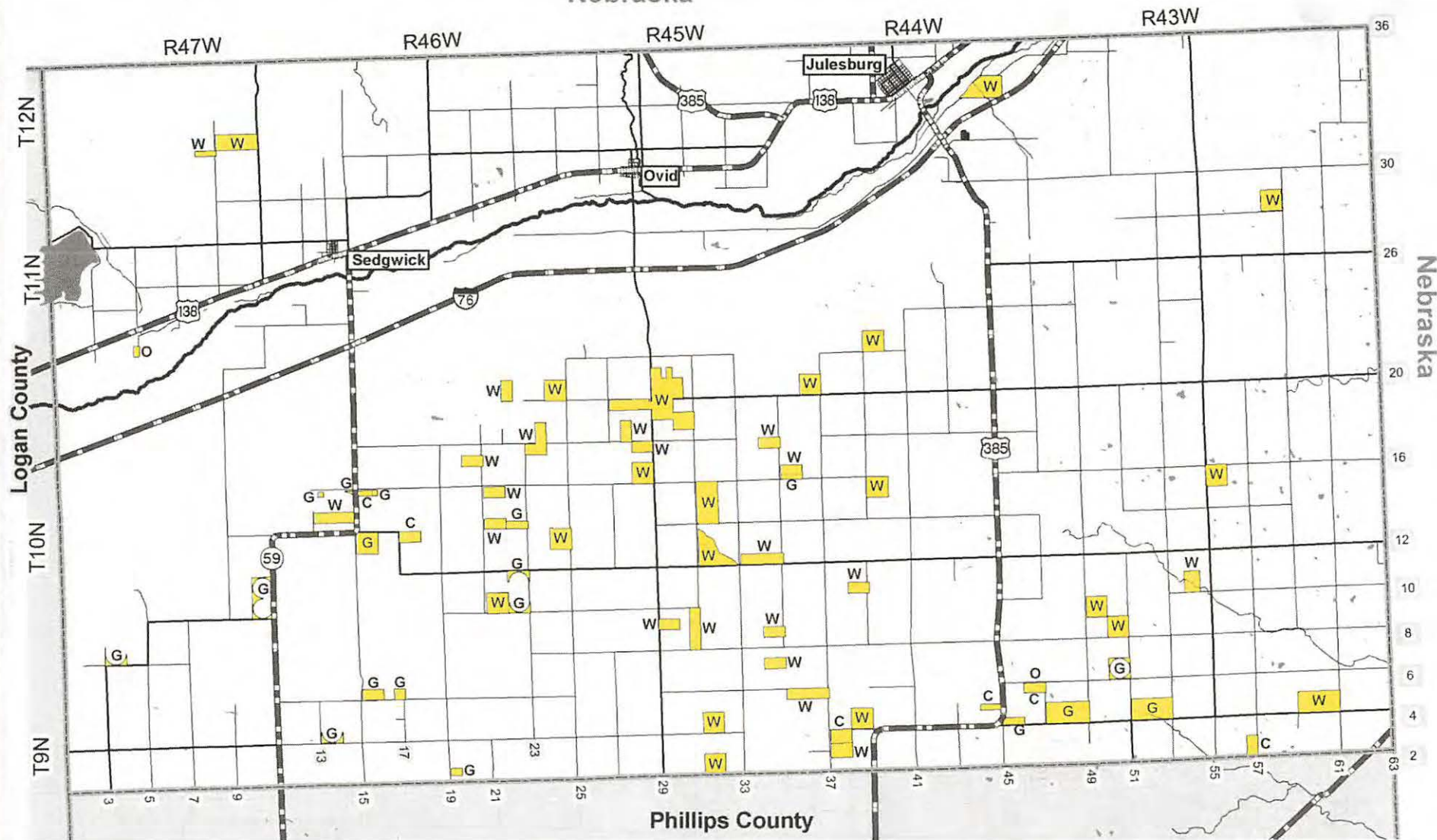
**Logan
County**

Walk-In Property Cover Types

G Grass **C** Corn **O** Other **W** Wheat



Nebraska



Sedgwick County

Walk-In Property Cover Types



Grass



Wheat



Corn

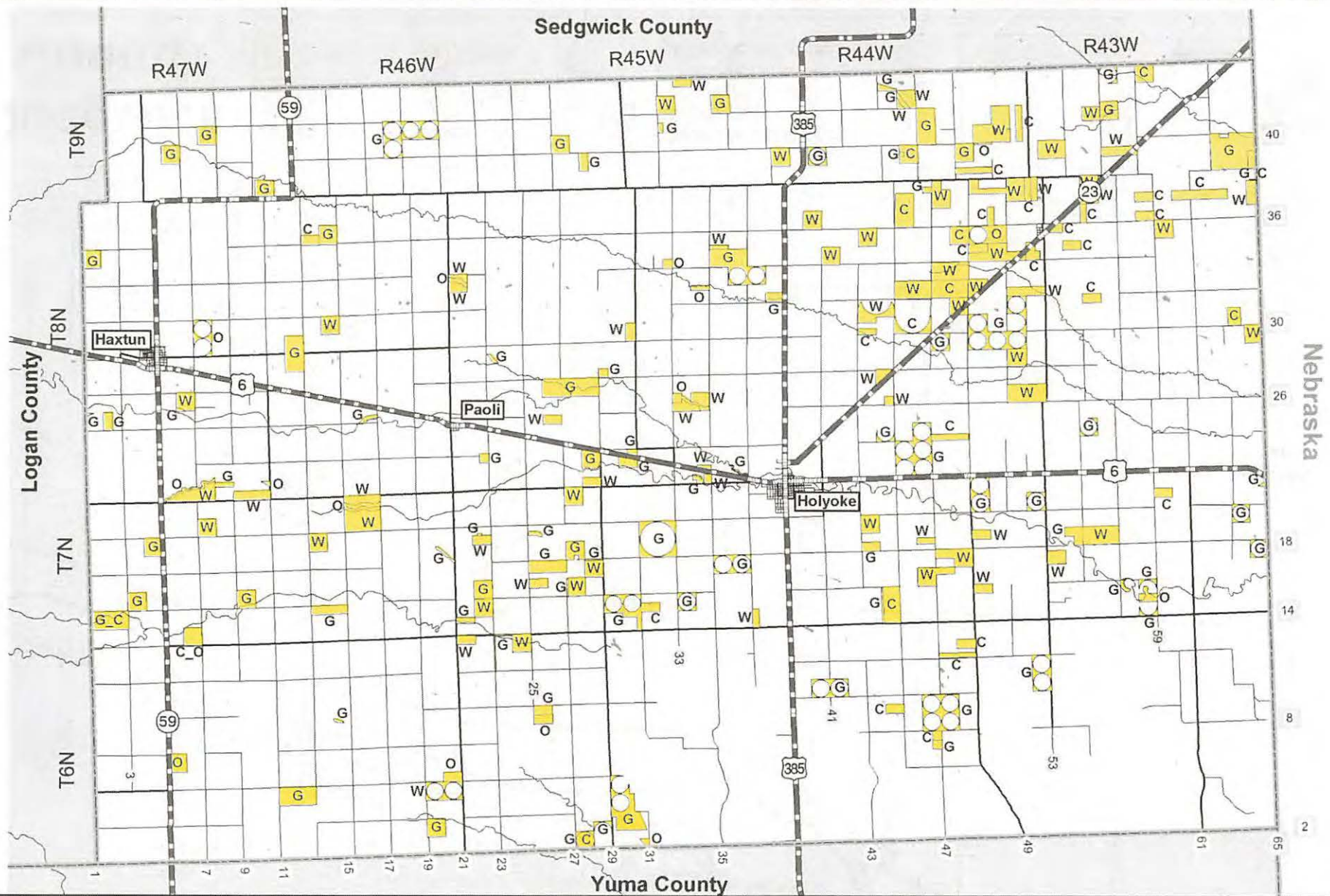


Other



Thanks to the Phillips County Pheasants Forever Chapter for acquiring access to an additional 335 acres.





Phillips County

Walk-In Property Cover Types

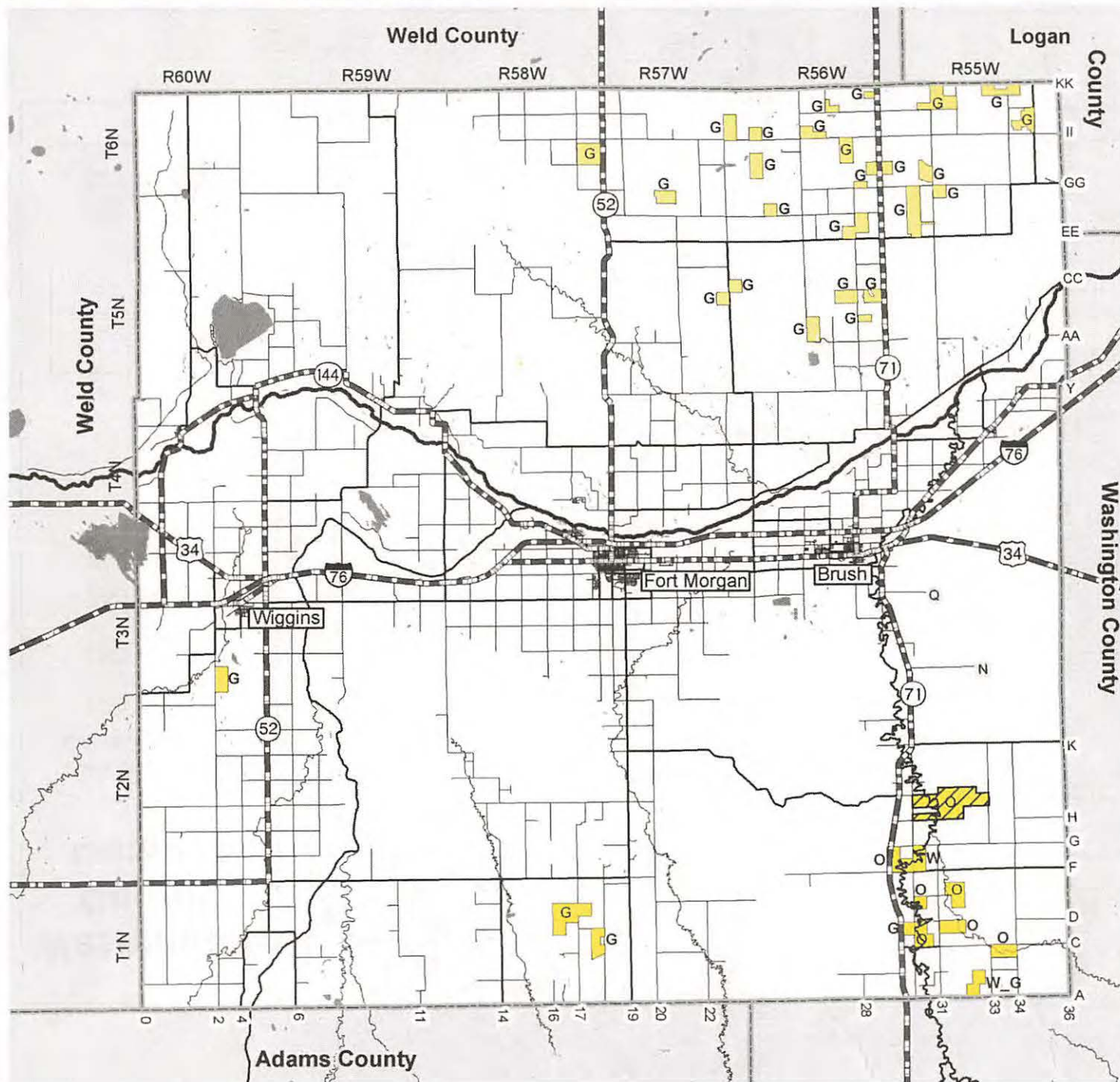
- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| G Grass | W Wheat |
| C Corn | O Other |



Thanks to the Phillips County Pheasants Forever Chapter for acquiring access to an additional 11,500 acres.

And to High Plains Land Conservancy for acquiring access to 1,200 acres.





Morgan County

Walk In Property
Cover Types

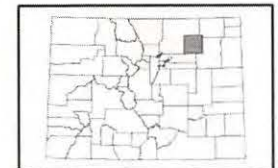
G Grass

C Corn

W Wheat

O Other

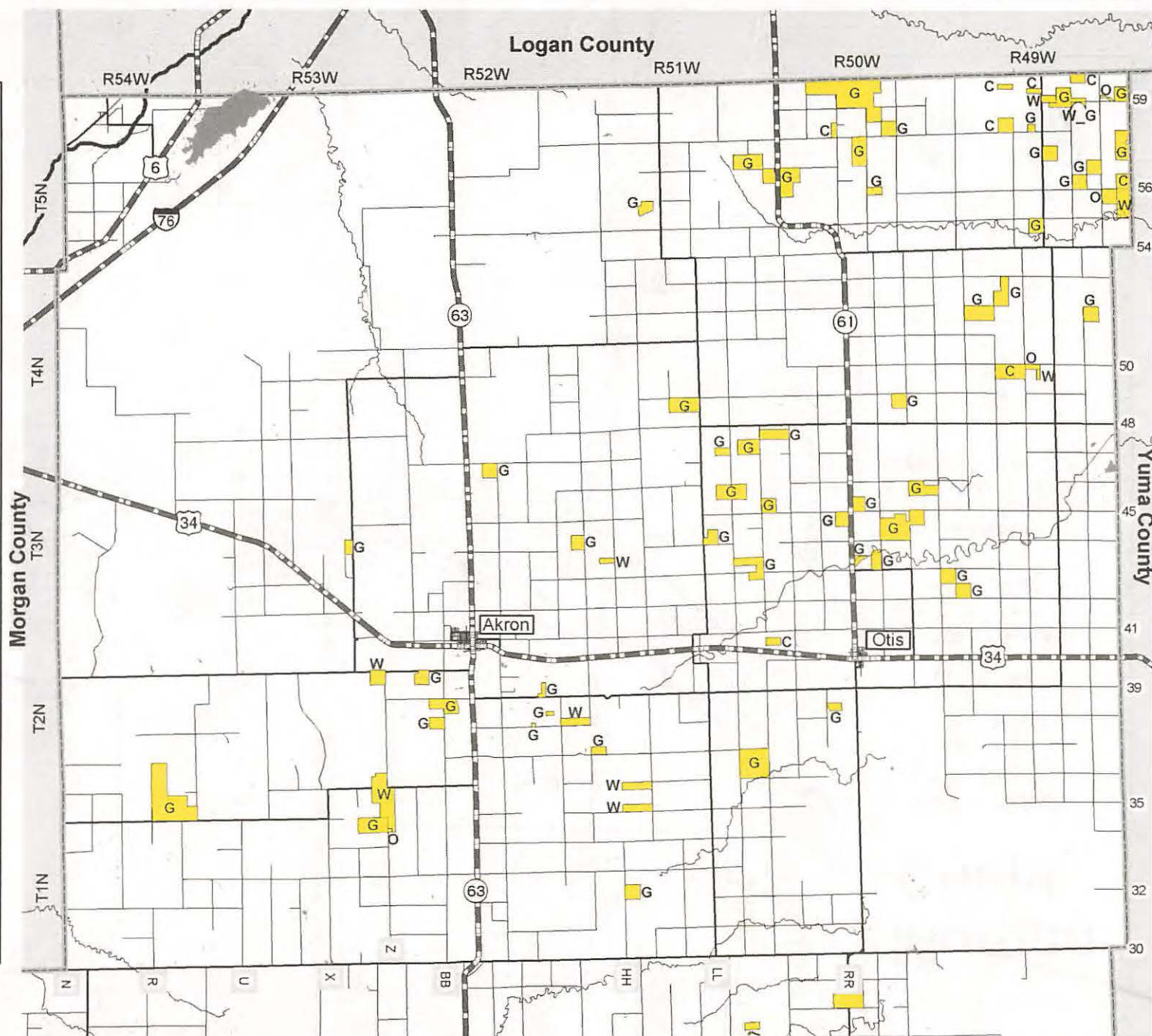
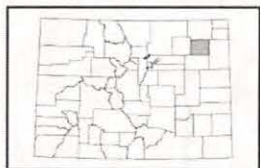
We thank Robert Parker for donating an additional 2,393 acres to the Walk-In Program.

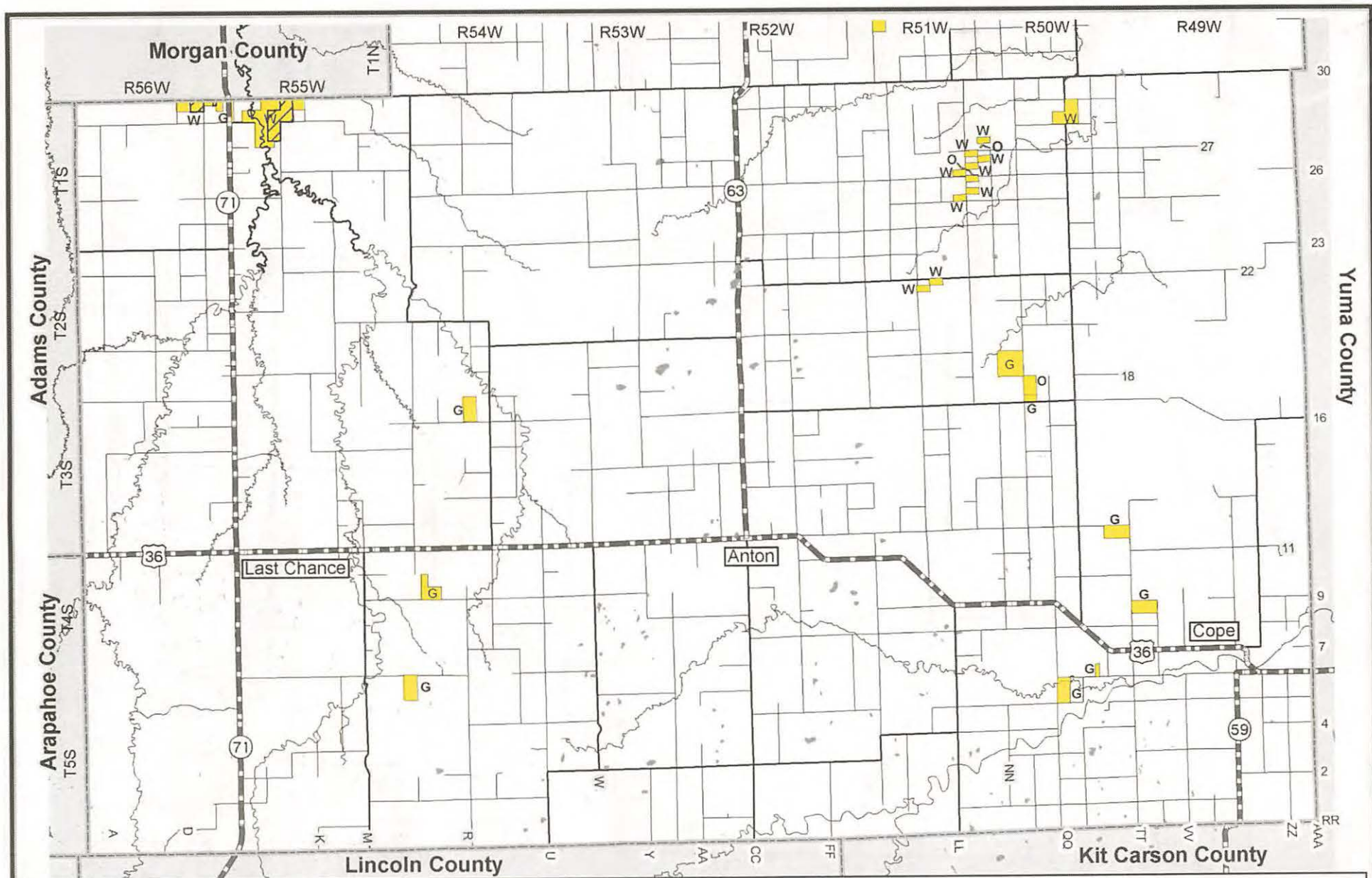


Washington County North Half

Walk-In Property
Cover Types

- G Grass
- C Corn
- W Wheat
- O Other





Washington County South Half

Walk-In Property Cover Types



Grass



Wheat



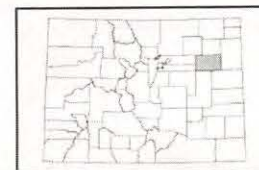
Corn



Other



We thank Robert Parker for donating an additional 2,393 acres to the Walk-In Program.



Yuma County

North Half

Walk-In Property Cover Types



Grass



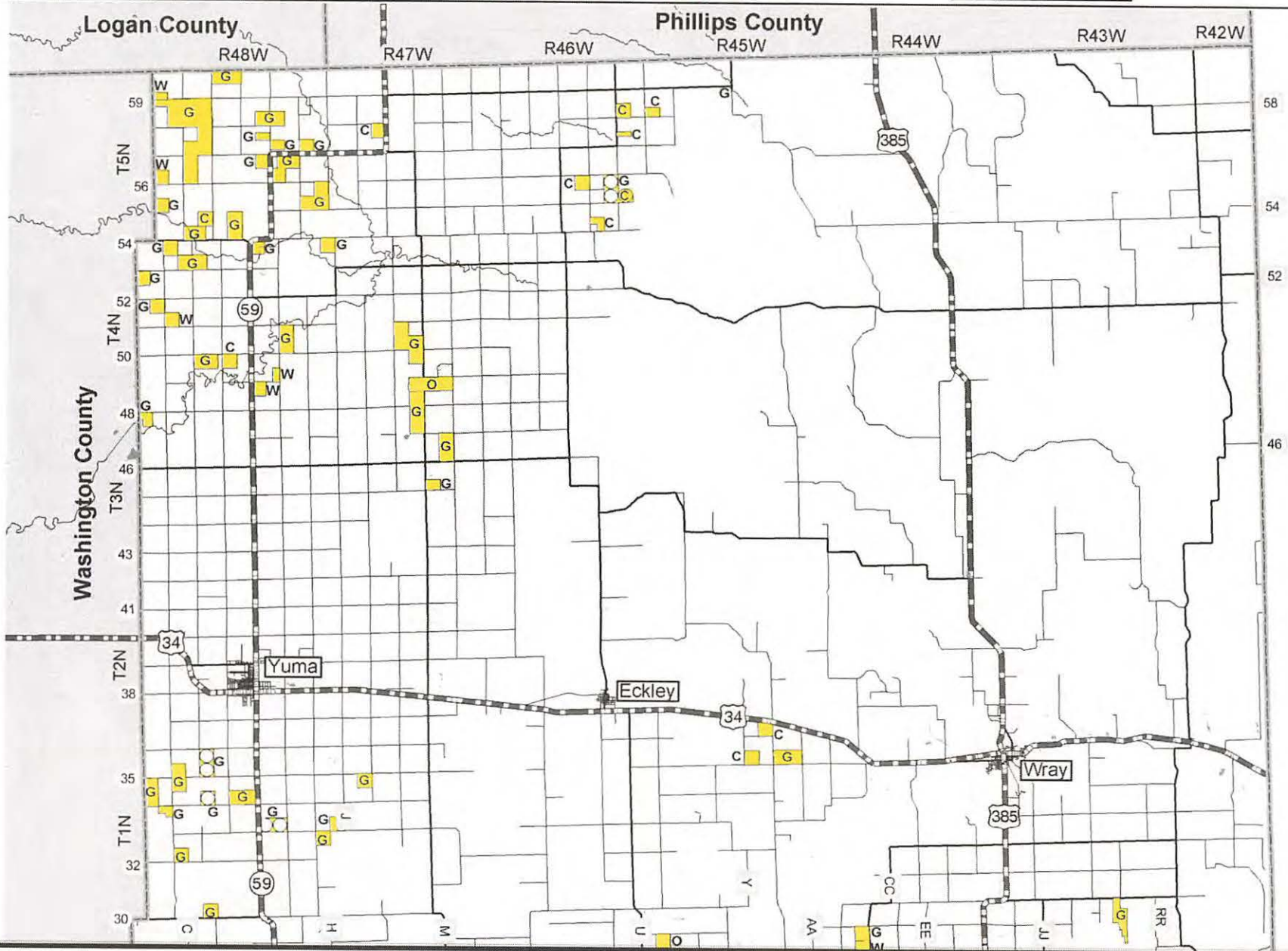
Wheat

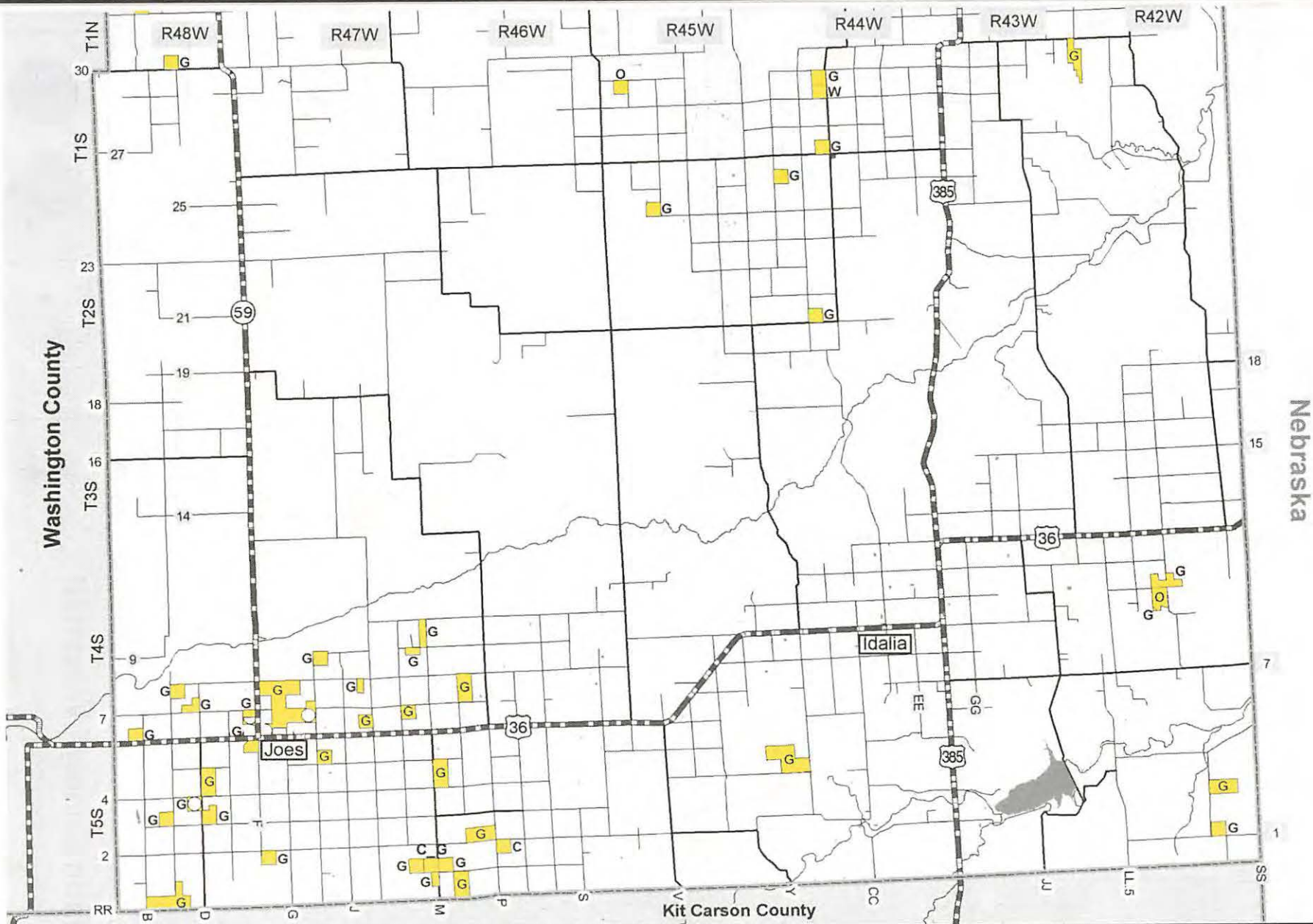


Corn



Other





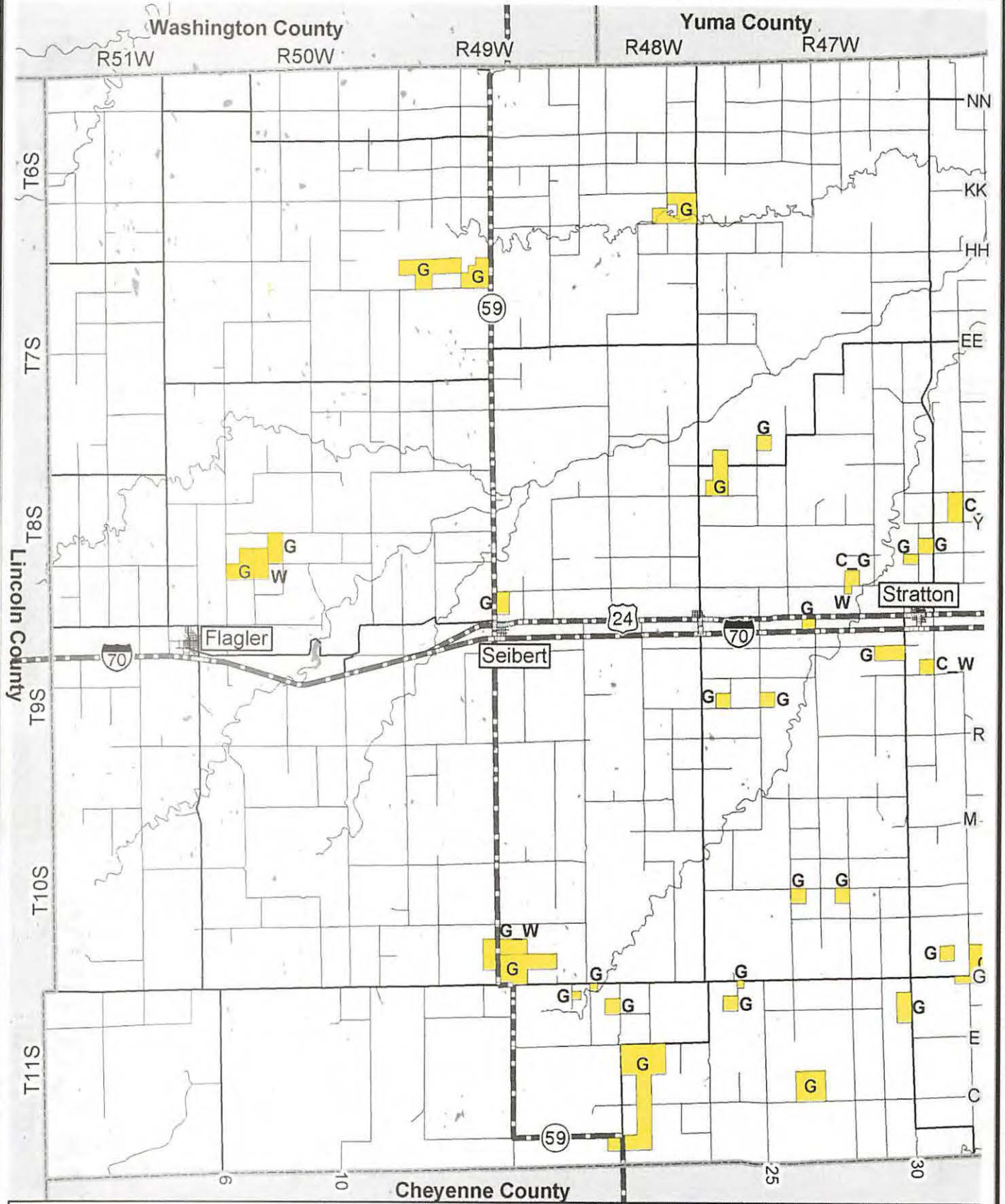
Yuma County

South Half

Walk-In Property Cover Types

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| G Grass | W Wheat |
| C Corn | O Other |

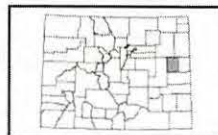


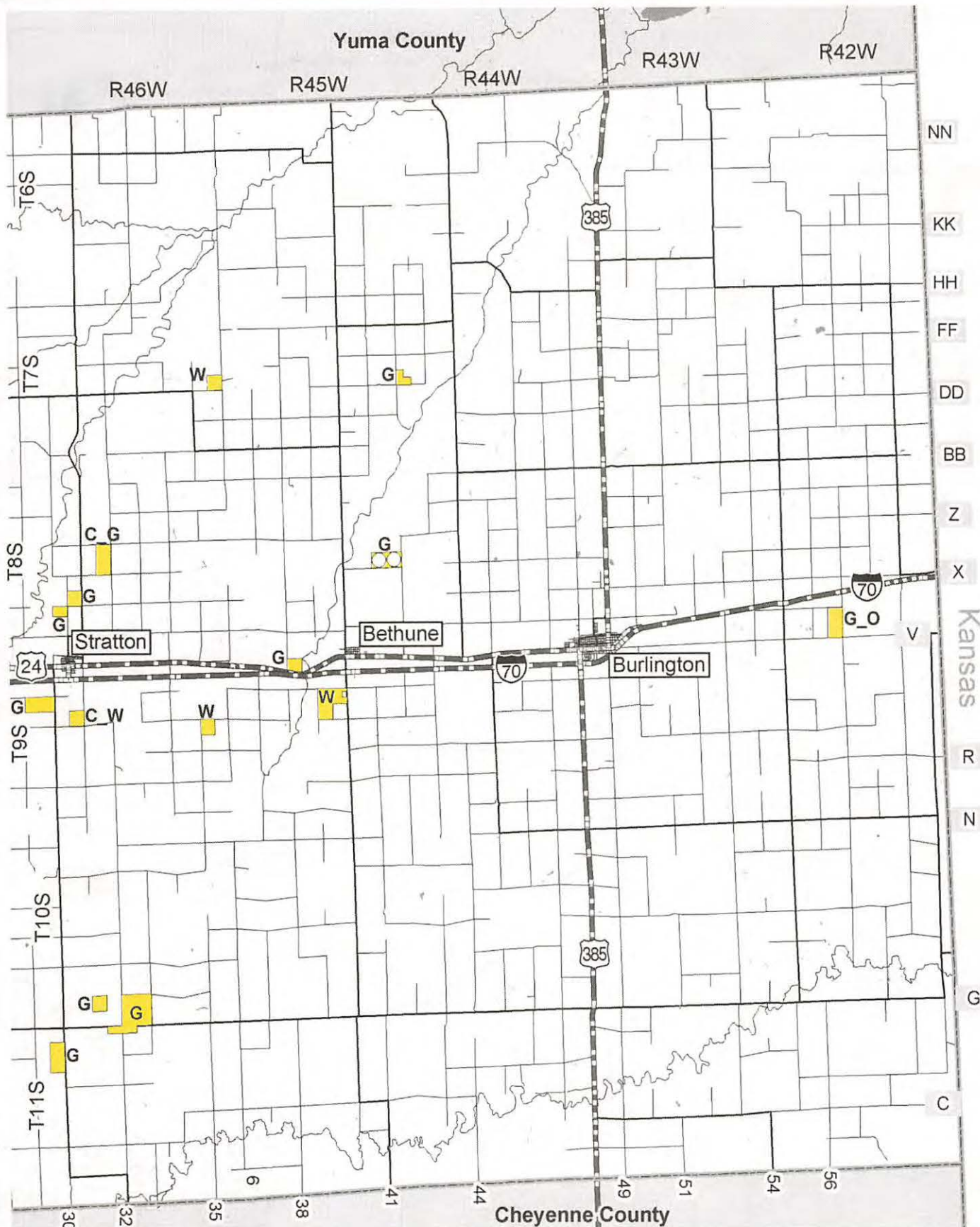


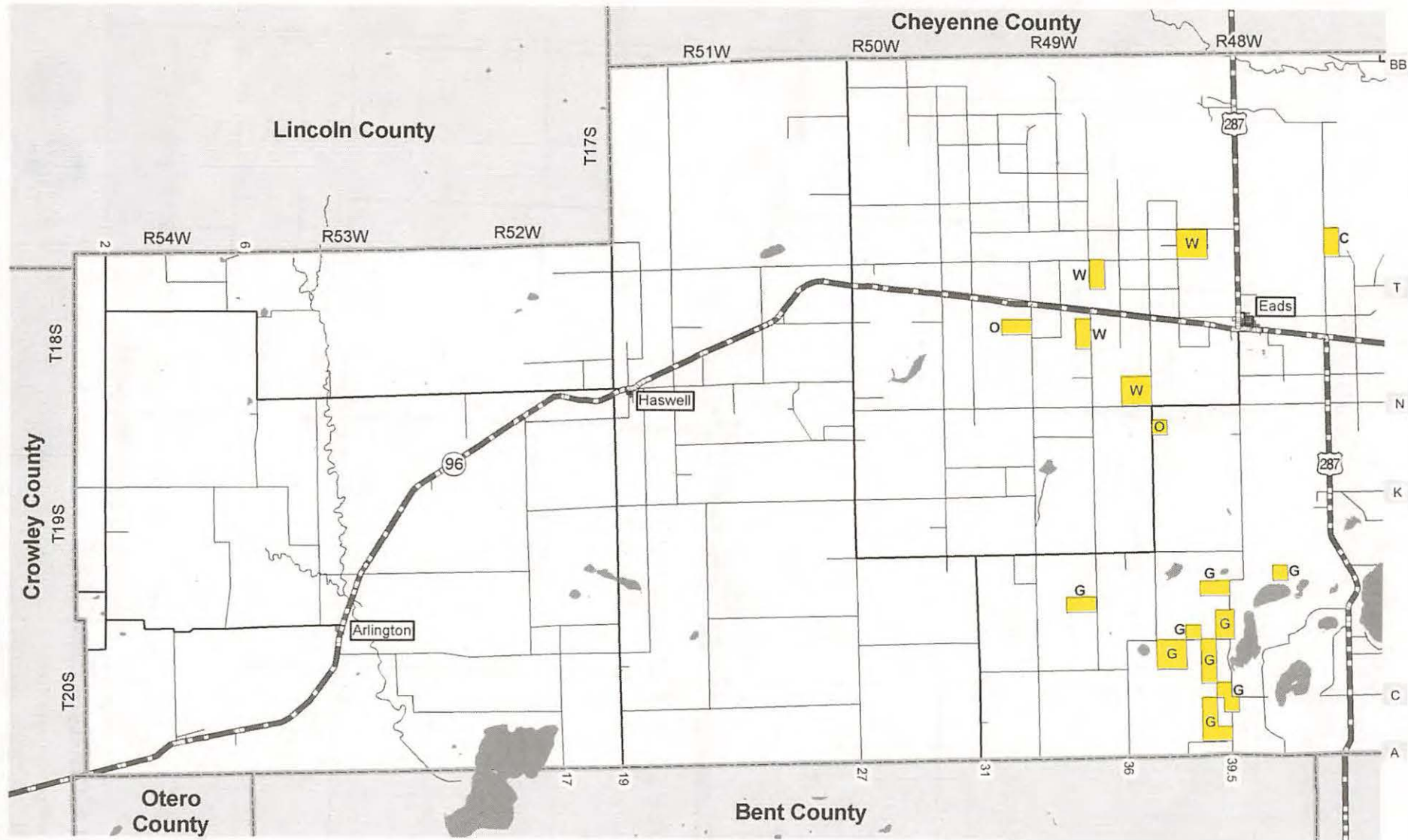
Kit Carson County - West Half

Walk-In Property Cover Types

G Grass **C** Corn **W** Wheat **O** Other





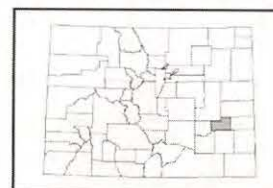


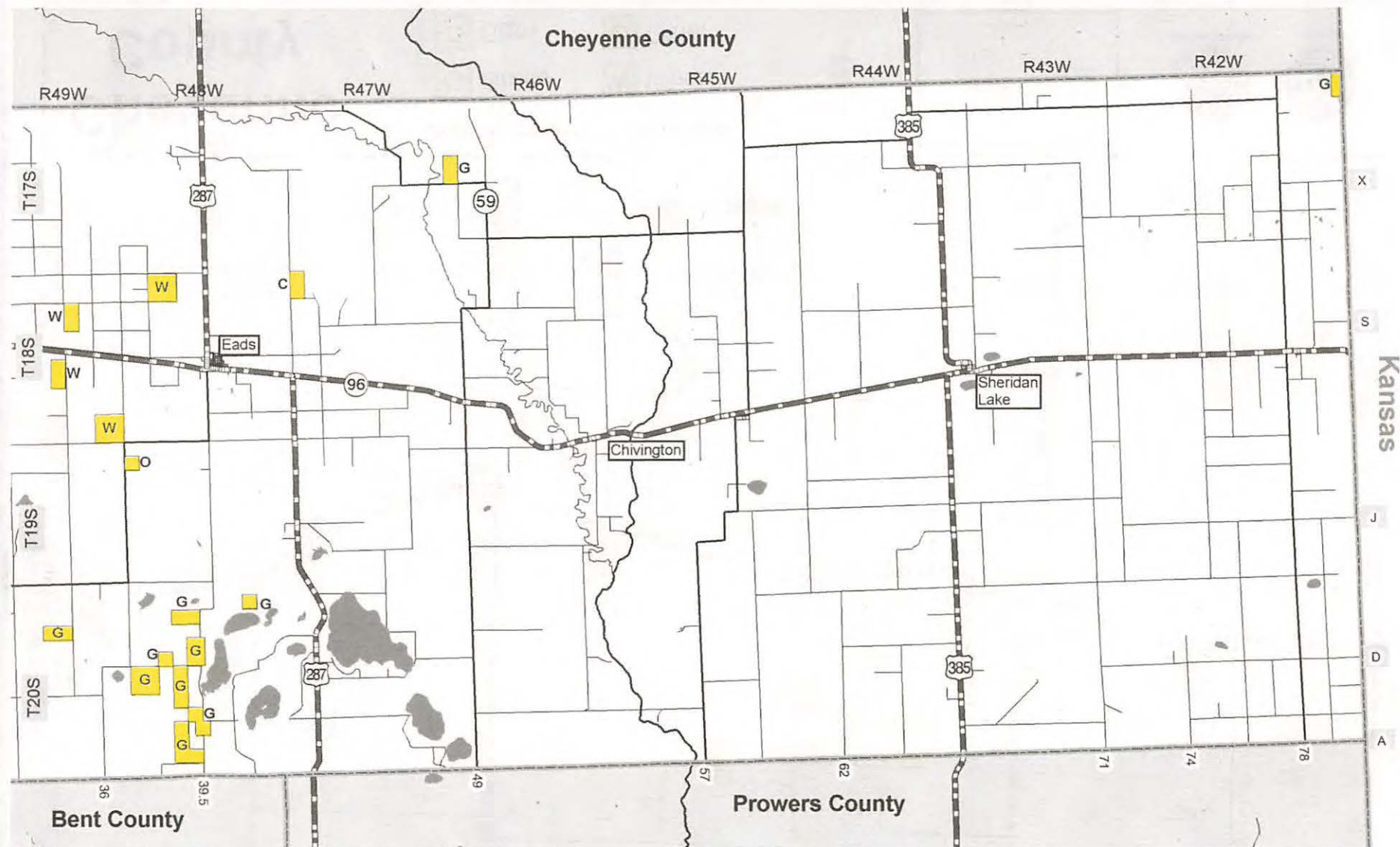
Kiowa County West Half

Much of the land accepted in
Kiowa County is for goose hunting

Walk-In Property Cover Types

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| G Grass | W Wheat |
| C Corn | O Other |





Kiowa County **East Half**

Much of the land accepted in
Kiowa County is for goose hunting

Walk-In Property Cover Types



Grass



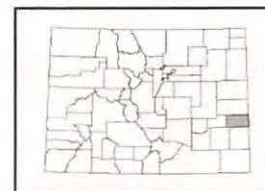
Wheat

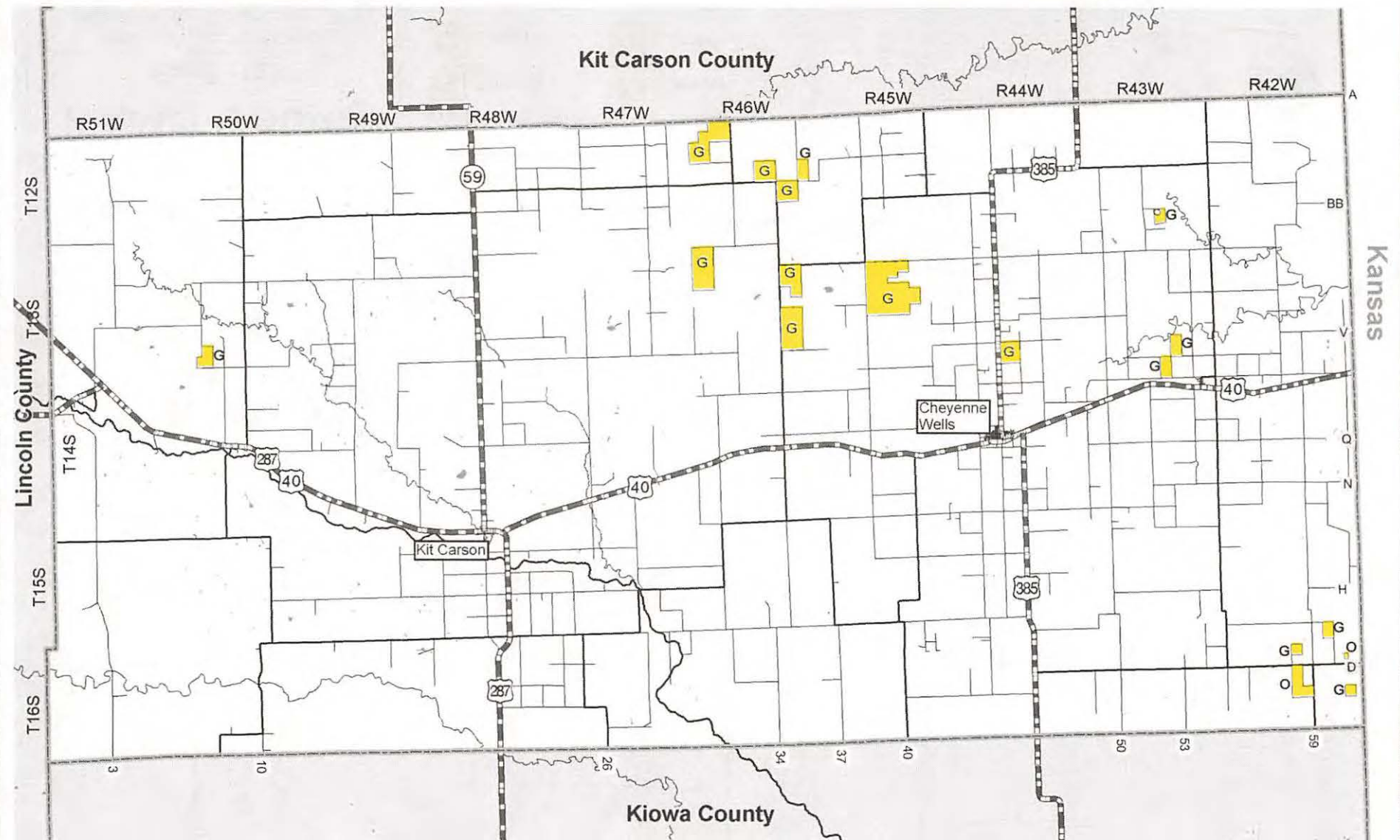


Corn



Other



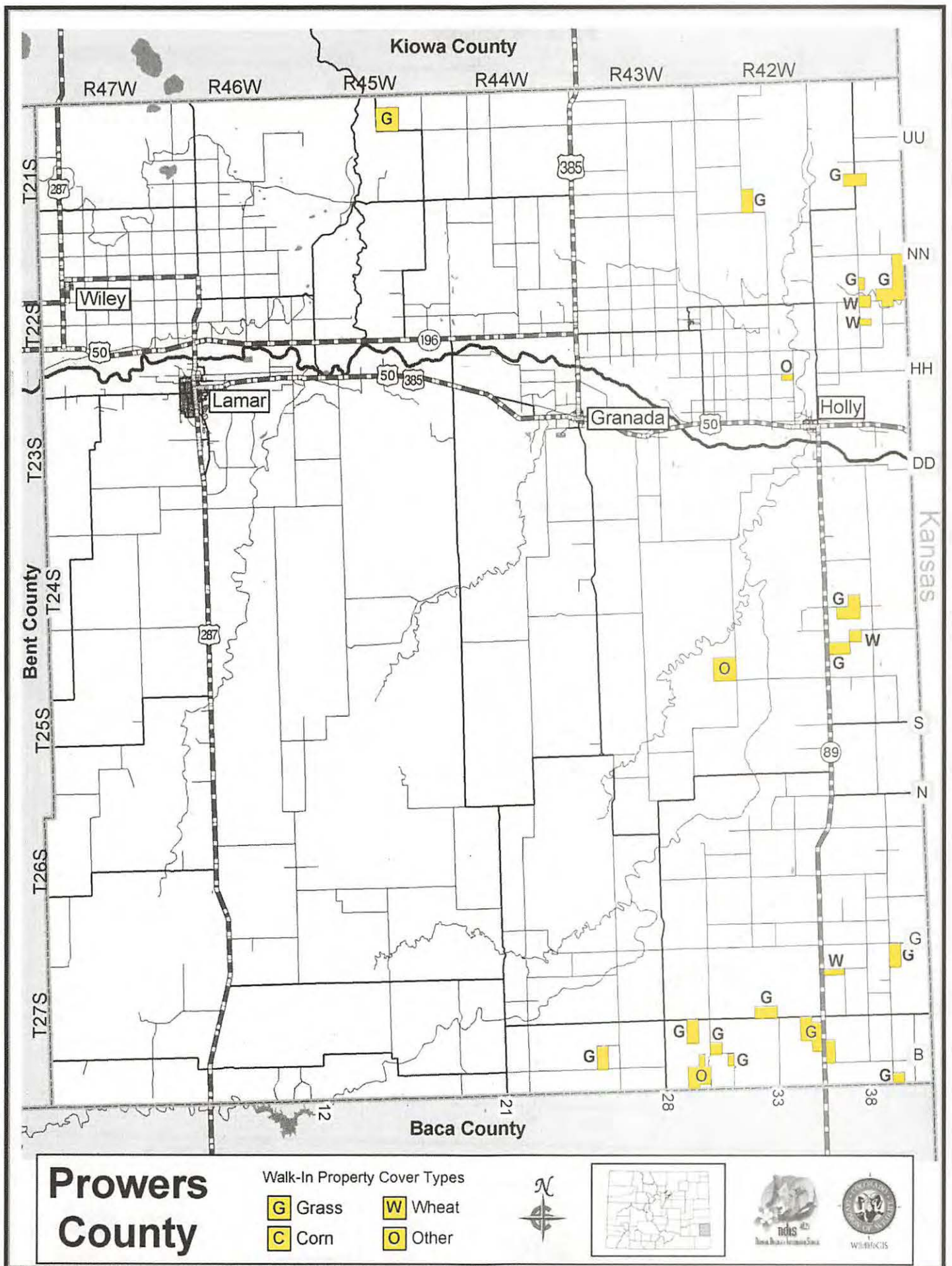


Cheyenne County

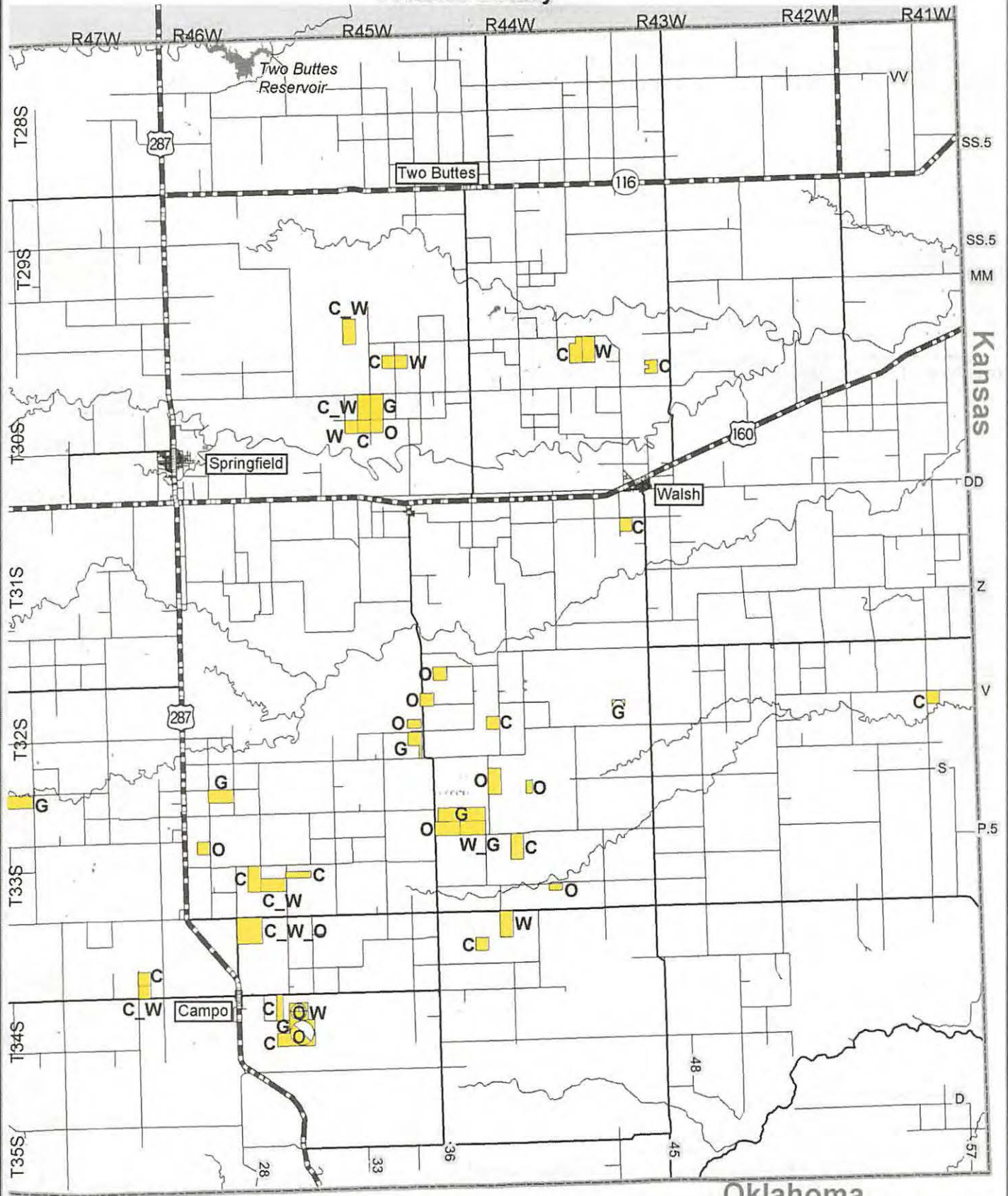
Walk-In Property Cover Types

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| G Grass | W Wheat |
| C Corn | O Other |





Prowers County



**Baca
County**

Walk-In Property Cover Types



Grass



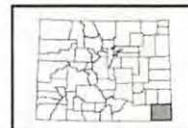
Corn



Wheat



Other



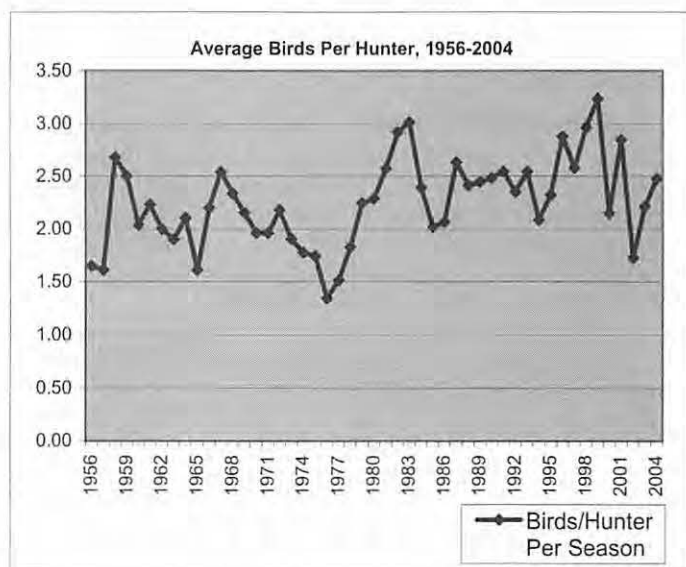
Oklahoma

2005 Outlook

Hunting success in 2004 continued the positive track started in 2003, from the 2002 all-time low harvest of 33,000 pheasants. In 2004, hunter responses from phone harvest surveys indicate that hunters harvested 47,000 pheasants, showing a stable harvest from 2003, when hunters harvested approximately 48,000 pheasants. Spring population surveys also show an increasing pheasant population across the Walk-In Program area - 2005 crowing counts increased 23% from 2004, although crowing counts give no estimate of nesting success or brood survival.

Colorado's pheasant hunting outlook is mixed for 2005, but could show continuing improvement over 2004. Due to a dry winter across much of eastern Colorado, early nesting and brood rearing conditions were below average over most of the Walk-In counties, but improved rapidly as significant precipitation fell in June and continued into July, particularly in central and southeast Colorado. Nesting success and brood survival for both quail and pheasants appears to be very good in the central and southeast counties, and should result in good hunting, although with increased habitat quality, birds tend to be widely distributed. Across a portion of northeast Colorado, dry conditions in the spring remained through late July, reducing habitat quality and forcing pheasants to concentrate around sprinkler irrigation fields more than normal. Hunters will find that birds are more concentrated in the northeast than in 2004, simply because there is less suitable habitat on the landscape in 2005.

Field reports are mixed as well, from both landowners and CDOW field staff, with some reporting very good numbers of chicks while others are more cautious. Region-wide, populations are probably slightly higher than in 2004. Hunters will need to look closely at habitat in the areas that they hunt. In areas hampered by drought, expect to find a few less pheasants than normal, but expect them to be more concentrated. In areas with a substantial amount of good cover, birds could be widely dispersed, especially early in the season.



How to Find More Pheasants:

Introduction

The Walk-in Access Program should eliminate one of the biggest obstacles to bagging some pheasants in eastern Colorado – having a good place to hunt. Successful pheasant hunting requires a basic understanding of how pheasants relate to different cropping systems. Agricultural practices (along with weather patterns) absolutely determine pheasant abundance and distribution. Pheasants move around the landscape taking advantage of temporary cropland conditions favorable to their survival and generally avoiding those that aren't. In order to be consistently successful you must be able to recognize these favorable conditions (cropping patterns) so that you spend most of your hunting time in the relatively small portion of the landscape pheasants are spending their time in. Eastern Colorado is dominated by relatively few habitat types so it isn't as hard as it might seem.

A. Dryland wheat farming

Dryland wheat farming predominates where irrigation water is not available. "Winter" wheat fields are obvious in the fall as fields with young wheat plants spaced evenly in drill rows 12 inches apart. These fields are of no benefit to pheasants in the fall or winter as they provide no food or cover from predators or weather, but they will be very important for spring nesting and brood rearing habitat. Wheat fields remain critical for adults and broods until harvest (at least), which typically occurs between the end of June and the middle of July. How wheat is harvested, and what treatments are done to the stubble to control weeds after harvest have more to do with pheasant distribution and survival in eastern Colorado than any other factor. Cutting stubble short, using herbicides to kill weeds, tilling wheat stubble, and grazing, all reduce pheasant use of wheat stubble, as do crops that are intermittently planted into the wheat systems. For hunting purposes, pay attention to these four factors:

1. Stubble height is a good indicator of pheasant abundance. Fifteen to 30-inch wheat stubble is optimal for pheasant habitat and for hunting.
2. Weed growth, especially sunflowers, kochia and Russian thistle, is equally important to stubble height. Excess weed growth can turn an average stubble field into a pheasant magnet. Fields with foxtail millet and other grassy weeds are not as beneficial to pheasants, and will not attract as many birds.
3. Alternate crops are common in wheat farming, and include non-irrigated corn, grain sorghum, sunflowers, and proso millet. Only corn and grain sorghum provide pheasant habitat and hunting cover.
4. Look at the amount of cover in the field - generally, the more cover, the better pheasant potential for the field. Height of the cover and density are both important, and you will rarely find a field in Colorado that is too tall or thick for pheasants. The opposite conditions are often true.

CRP Fields

CRP fields can be a wild card in dryland wheat areas, as they provide an alternate habitat for nesting, brooding and wintering pheasants. Cover quality in CRP fields can be extremely variable, depending on the age of the field, the grass mix planted, and impacts of recent droughts and/or management prescriptions. Fields are enrolled into the CRP program in 10-year contracts, during which a decline in habitat quality is common, without a prescribed management treatment. There are 5 keys to pheasant abundance in CRP.

1. New CRP fields that are planted to a sorghum cover crop or young stands of CRP still dominated by annual weeds, are normally the most productive fields for pheasants and for hunting. Pheasants concentrate in these fields due to the sheer abundance of winter cover. Look for fields with tall, thick sorghum, or dense kochia and sunflowers.
2. As grass begins to take over a field, pheasant abundance generally declines, but can be very good if weeds and alfalfa are present in the field. Expect pheasants to leave these fields to feed in adjacent fields, but to return to night roost and loaf during the day.
3. Mature grass stands can be great for pheasants, but birds are reliant on adjacent lands to provide brood habitat and food sources. The key is to find mature fields with switchgrass and yellow indian grass (look for tall orange and red colored grasses), next to crop stubble, which provides a good food source in addition to the excellent cover in the grass.
4. Poor quality CRP, either due to short grasses or cool season grasses, can be productive for hunting, as some pheasants prefer to night-roost in thin cover. If the only CRP in the area happens to be of low cover quality, it might still be worth a hunt, especially early in the morning or late in the day.
5. Sorghum food plots, within or adjacent to CRP, can concentrate pheasants, due to the diversity of cover they provide. Even in poor CRP, food plots can be worth an exploratory hunt.

Irrigated Agriculture

When considering the impacts of the recent drought on pheasant populations, one would intuitively think that intensively irrigated areas would be the mainstays of pheasant populations in Colorado. However, the reverse is normally true. Intensively irrigated areas have low pheasant densities, particularly if ditch irrigation predominates as it does along the Front Range or in river valleys like the South Platte or Arkansas. In eastern Colorado, corn and alfalfa are the main crops grown with irrigation, although alternate crops are becoming more common, including wheat, sugar beets, grain sorghum, and sunflowers. Even though grain crops create a good food source, fields are farmed road ditch to road ditch and fall-plowed or mowed, leaving no secure cover for pheasants in fall, winter, or early spring. Some ideas for finding pheasants in irrigated agriculture lands follow:

1. Don't expect many pheasants where irrigated alfalfa dominates the landscape. Irrigated alfalfa is a death trap for nesting hens because it greens up early which induces hens to establish nests, but most nests and many hens are lost to the first hay cutting, which normally occurs immediately prior to hatching. What birds are in the area normally aren't too difficult to find - look for weedy road ditches, un-farmed corners, or overgrown irrigation ditches.

2. Pheasant densities improve as you move to sprinkler irrigation systems, since the 7-acre (typically) pivot corners are usually planted to wheat or grass and can provide good cover. Corn stalks provide food but usually do not provide secure roosting cover. CRP is conspicuously absent from heavily irrigated areas, as are the non-irrigated crops that are important for nesting and roosting cover

3. Transition areas where center-pivot corn irrigation mixes with dryland wheat production often produce our highest pheasant densities. Once the corn is harvested, the birds go back into nearby wheat stubble or CRP to roost, but often forage in corn fields. This combination provides the best mix of cover to maximize pheasant production and survival year-around, all in a locally small area, which can result in large concentrations of birds.

Understanding the basics about where pheasants spend their time in cropped areas will greatly increase your ability to find pheasants. Following are some things you will want to look for.

1. Farmed areas that are broken up by un-farmed habitats that add diversity to the landscape. Examples of these include creek bottoms, farmsteads, field windbreaks, thickets and weedy fence rows. These habitats provide escape and travel cover between crop fields and because they are frequently overgrown with pheasant friendly cover, they are also great places to hunt and can be easily worked by both small and large hunting parties.

2. Lower pheasant densities normally exist where dry cropland is scattered among large tracts of shortgrass pasture. These areas usually support less pheasants because of a general lack of cover and an abundance of predators. Pheasants in these areas will concentrate in the best quality cover available to them, and you can be successful if you can identify those spots.

3. Cover and food - pheasants shift locations seasonally to take advantage of the fields that offer the most secure cover, while staying close to a dependable food source. Finding that field, whether it be weedy stubble, tall grass CRP, or something else, is integral to successful hunting. Birds normally stay in these areas until pressure forces them to leave, or habitat quality degrades.

Also consider the following items and how they can relate to your hunting area.

1. During our telemetry study, 45 percent of all daytime locations from November to January were in CRP, 31 percent were in wheat stubble, 9 percent were in corn stubble and 9 percent were in creek bottoms, weeds, windbreaks (trees), abandoned farms, etc.

2. Pheasants move less than commonly thought. Average home range size for radio-marked hens was fairly small, totaling 2-4 square miles, while their core habitat was significantly less, often just a field or two totaling a few hundred acres. Band returns for roosters indicate that they move even less than hens. Consequently, if you find a variety of good quality fields within any 2-4 square mile block, you should find pheasants somewhere within that area.

Tips and Tactics

First, make sure you are hunting where there are pheasants! This means not only hunting in areas where there are good pheasant populations, but being in the right field at the right time of day. The Walk-In Program will help in finding good areas, since all of these fields are located in areas where there are at least moderate pheasant numbers, but success is dependent on your ability to get close to pheasants. Here are some ideas to help you zero in on good areas and prepare your party for success:

1. Preseason scouting, especially in mid to late October after dispersal of young birds is complete, can shorten the task of finding pheasants considerably. Drive along gravel roads with a good plat map (or this Atlas) to mark sightings. Early morning and evening are best because pheasants are most active then. Remember, you cannot legally access Walk-In Fields until season starts, so scouting will have to be done from the road.

2. When you find birds, look at the nearby fields. Why are they here, where are the birds roosting, where are they feeding, how do they move between fields, should all be questions that you should be thinking about. For night roosting areas, look for tall, weedy wheat stubble or CRP fields with tall, dense grasses, often near a food source like corn or wheat stubble. Shrub plots, tree rows, weed patches are all things that should catch your eye in addition to the basic covers.

3. Focus on fields or cover types that your personal hunting style allows you to be successful in, considering your party size, hunting dogs, or simple preferences for hunting certain cover types.

4. Develop a hunt plan based on your scouting efforts. Think about how pheasants will react to hunters, how they will escape, and which fields will swing the odds in your favor.

5. Prepare to execute that plan quickly and quietly. Too often hunters pull up to a field, slam the doors, let the dogs out, then talk about how to hunt the field. That works with young birds on opening day, but after a few shots have been fired, roosters will be implementing their own escape strategy as soon as they are aware of your presence.

Once you have found some pheasants, the hunting strategy you use will probably be the largest factor in your success. The following suggestions come from our direct observation of hunters in the field.

1. There is no question a good bird dog will locate more birds, and generally make hunting more fun. A good pointer or flushing dog will also give you more

confidence when hunting large fields of CRP or weedy wheat stubble. If you have a dog, use it to your advantage.

2. Dogless hunters can be very successful, but strategy becomes much more important, as well as having confidence in the fields you are hunting. Use weather condition to your advantage, change direction frequently, and when you feel that a rooster is close and waiting for you to walk past, stop walking. Often enough to make it worthwhile, when you stop walking and stand quietly for a minute or so, a nearby rooster will panic and flush, usually right after you start walking again.

3. Hunt fields at the right time of day. In the morning and evening birds will be moving from roosting sites towards food. Put yourself and your hunting party between the birds and their food source, and hunt towards the roosting areas, or vice versa when birds are leaving feeding areas in the afternoon. Some fields offer birds everything they need, and can be hunted from daylight till dusk, but frequently, pheasants use different fields to meet their daily requirements.

4. Avoid pushing birds to other good quality fields if possible. Rarely will a wise rooster flush when he can run into good cover. Pay attention to how roosters beat you (and they will) and devise ways to cover those escape routes next time.

5. Birds become conditioned to hunter activity when every party uses similar tactics, so try some off-the-wall tactics. Generally, most fields are hunted the same way and in the same direction by all the groups that hunt the field, due to the access point or prevailing wind direction. Changing tactics and hiking around the cover to hunt it 'backwards', regardless of wind direction, can confuse the birds into sitting tight.

6. Blockers are a welcome addition early in the year, but an absolute necessity for late season birds, providing that they can approach and remain at their stand quietly. Wearing orange for safety and visual communication is recommended.

7. Use weather to your advantage. Mild weather allows pheasants to use any moderate quality field in the area, while serious winter weather restricts pheasants to a few good areas. If the weather is mild, expect to find pheasants in some unlikely places. As weather deteriorates, more and more pheasants concentrate in the best cover available. Don't forget wind, which will influence pheasant location as well. Snow can be a boon for pheasant hunters, if snowfall is deep enough to discourage wise roosters from running. If snowfall was significant (over 4 inches) pheasant behavior changes immediately. Pheasants pile into plum thickets, tree groves around farms, brushy creek bottoms, abandoned farmsteads and thick CRP.

8. Tracking pheasants in 2-3 inches of snow is a joy, and will teach observant hunters how roosters avoid them. Watch for tracks that stop in weed patches or suddenly change directions, and if lots of fresh tracks suggest there are more birds in that field than you have flushed, don't be afraid to hunt it again.

