

Fall hunting season is here

by Hal Spain

I think I've been doing this column for somewhere near the past twenty-eight years. So when I sold the paper to the McCutchens a couple of years ago, they wanted me to carry on the tradition. Just because you change jobs doesn't mean you quit caring about what is important to you. Thus the quality and quantity of the county's wildlife and fishing resources remain a driving force in continuing this discussion each year.

At this point I always discuss my opinion on what the upcoming deer, turkey, and quail seasons will have to offer in Coke County. And then I detail the nuts and bolts (dates, bag limits, etc.) of the upcoming season; so if you want to skip on down to that please feel free to do so. After all, opinions are like elbows - most everybody has one or two, and I don't know if mine are any more accurate than anyone else.

Another tradition is that I always go into last year's Guide to see what I said about last year's hunting season. 2011 is a year that most of us want to forget as soon as possible. Wildfires had ravaged the county to the tune of somewhere near 200,000 acres. In addition, most areas of the county received less than eight to

ten inches of rainfall for the whole year. Needless to say, my predictions for last year were pretty bleak.

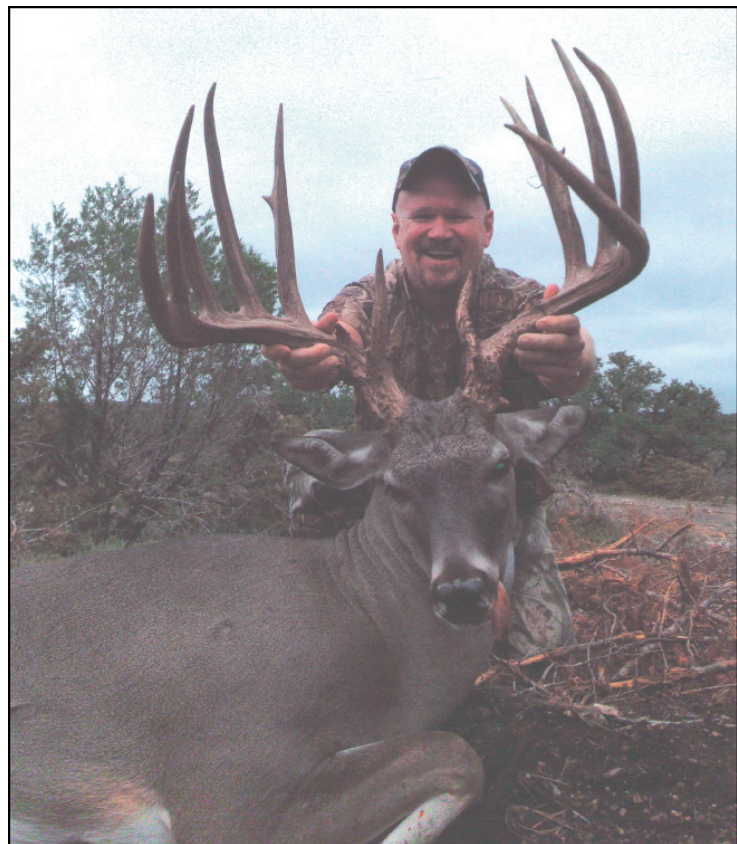
Fast forward to 2012, and we are probably not out of the soup, but the outlook for the upcoming season is much more promising. The main indicator of a hunting season in any area and especially in our area is the rainfall total and distribution. Following a record drought in 2011, the first part of the new year was a relatively wet winter and spring, which was exactly what we needed. This was followed by a couple of dry months during the summer, and all of us were wondering if we were going back to the same weather pattern that had caused the dry weather.

As fall arrived; so did the rains. Most of the county received from six to ten inches of rainfall during the most recent wet spell. Both Oak Creek Lake and Lake Spence got some much-needed runoff from these rains. In addition, the return of El Nino is prompting the weather forecasters to predict a wet winter and spring. Although we're sort of short on time to grow some grass before cold weather, the wheat grazing is very promising, and the weeds and cool season grasses should also be extremely beneficial to our wildlife populations.

Concerning my predictions, I have already been proven wrong on my dove season expectations. I thought our dove hunting would be limited to the first couple of weekends of dove season. As it turned out, due to the rainfall, we have had what I would call a pretty good dove season this year, all things considered.

Our bow season for deer started out with a whimper, as pretty much all the bow hunters were requested to remain in camp by landowners because opening weekend of bow season we received up to ten inches of rainfall throughout the county. The landowners didn't want their ranch roads all rutted up, and the deer weren't moving during the storms anyway. I haven't visited with any bow hunters since to find out how successful they have been. With the increase in browse, most of the deer weren't too interested in corn, and many of the bowhunters just decided to hang it up until the gun season begins.

I think we are still suffering from a carryover of the dry weather period. The deer numbers are there on most ranches; however, the reports of big horns (antlers) have been spotty. I do think this may be the year that you do not want to shoot that little 4 or 6 point buck. Give him a



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chance to get some age on him, and you'll have a nice buck in a year or two. As usual, I would rather you cull out some fat does on most of these places, depending upon what your total deer numbers show for the area you hunt. I think we probably raised a few turkeys this year, but what I would recommend is that you come back next spring and try to bag a gob-

bler during the spring season, especially if our moisture conditions are as good as predicted.

Being a quail hunter, I keep up with all the predictions from around the state. Most areas are not predicting enough numbers to hunt, particularly in the Rolling Plains and South Texas, traditional hot spots for quail. I think we hatched more

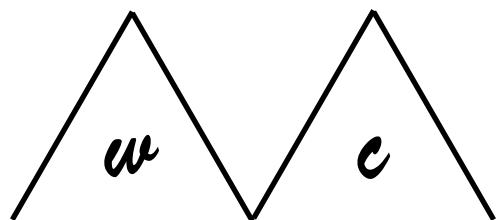
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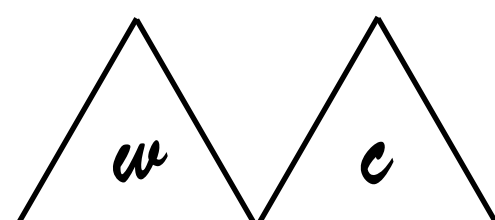


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