



The National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan and Partnerships

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July 7, 2017

The Honorable Pat Roberts, Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Honorable Chairman and Members of the Committee:

The National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan (hereafter, “National Plan”) is a blueprint for restoring and maintaining pheasant populations across the country. Written by more than two dozen experts from 23 state wildlife agencies (see Appendix), the National Plan details the habitat needed to support a national pheasant harvest goal of at least 5.9 million roosters.

When pheasants are abundant enough to sustain this level of harvest, over one million pheasant hunters generate an estimated \$1.2 billion in expenditures each year, including tens of millions in hunting license fees that support state wildlife agencies and their conservation programs benefitting hundreds of species. States have relied on pheasant hunting to help fund their conservation activities since the 1940s.

These benefits are realized only when grassland habitats are abundant enough in farmland landscapes to produce sufficient numbers of pheasants to support sustainable hunting opportunities across their established range. Farm Bill programs greatly influence the abundance of those habitats, and no conservation title program has been more beneficial than the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

The targeted level of pheasant hunting described in the National Plan last occurred during the 1990s and early 2000s, when national CRP enrollments frequently topped 34 million acres under a 40 million-acre statutory cap. As CRP and other grassland acres have declined over the last decade, the economic and conservation benefits derived from pheasant hunting have correspondingly diminished.

To restore those pheasant-related benefits, our partnership requests the following from the upcoming Farm Bill:

- First and foremost, restore the CRP cap to 36-40 million acres. Enrolled acres should continue to be prioritized in national and state Conservation Priority Areas (CPAs) that include national and state-level initiatives for fish and wildlife conservation. Eligible mid-contract management activities and criteria for cover management should be tailored to state-specific priority wildlife needs.
- In determining the federal funding necessary to maintain or expand the acreage enrolled in CRP and other conservation programs, calculations should account for the alternative costs of commodity title programs (e.g., crop insurance subsidies) in which those acres are, or would likely otherwise be, enrolled. The Committee should request this more accurate cost scoring approach from the Congressional Budget Office prior to submitting any proposed legislation for CBO consideration.

- Reauthorize the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Improvement Program at no less than \$150 million over 5 years. Increased public access to quality upland game habitats is essential to maintain hunting activity and economic benefits.
- Restore Agricultural Conservation Easement Program funding to a minimum of \$500 million per year, with an increase to at least \$750 million over the life of the Farm Bill.
- Increase the minimum amount of Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds required to be used for wildlife conservation practices to at least 10 percent annually, and ensure that each state achieves that threshold. To maximize general wildlife benefits, incorporate state input to target EQIP wildlife funds towards priority fish and wildlife species, including Species of Greatest Conservation Need as identified in State Wildlife Action Plans.

Your consideration of these requests is greatly appreciated. If more detailed information would be useful as the bill is drafted, please feel free to contact me or any of our member organizations. Thank you for service to the nation's natural resources and the communities that depend on them.

Sincerely,

Tony Leif

Chairman, National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan Management Board
 Director, Division of Wildlife, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

Appendix: Contributors to the National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan and Partnerships.

Colorado Division of Wildlife
 Idaho Department of Fish and Game*
 Illinois Department of Natural Resources*
 Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife
 Iowa Department of Natural Resources*
 Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism*
 Michigan Department of Natural Resources*
 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources*
 Missouri Department of Conservation
 Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
 Nebraska Game and Parks Commission*
 New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
 New York Department of Environmental Conservation
 North Dakota Game and Fish Department*
 Ohio Department of Natural Resources*
 Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
 Pennsylvania Game Commission*
 Pheasants Forever, Inc.*
 South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks*
 Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*
 Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
 Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife*
 Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

*National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan Management Board members