



The National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan and Partnerships

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December 5th, 2017

The Honorable Jane Doe
U.S. Senate / House of Representatives
XXX Senate/House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Senator/Representative Doe:

The National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan (hereafter, “National Plan”) is a blueprint for restoring and maintaining pheasant populations across the country. Endorsed by 23 state wildlife agencies (see Appendix) and written by more than two dozen of their staff experts, the National Plan calculates the habitat needed to support the level of pheasant hunting that occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s. During this reference period, over one million pheasant hunters generated 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, in turn benefitting hundreds of species.

That pheasant-fueled conservation engine is now sputtering, with recent pheasant hunter numbers the lowest on record. Farm bill conservation programs, most notably the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), have been the lifeblood of pheasant management and hunting across most of the species’ range since the late 1980s. Many of our partner states suffered a sharp decline in pheasant abundance and hunting participation coinciding with statutory reductions in the national CRP acreage cap in the 2008 and current 2014 farm bills, which in turn helped drive an overall loss of hunter participation and revenues. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, national hunter numbers declined by 2.2 million (-16%) from 2011 to 2016, with an associated loss of \$9.7 billion (-29%) in annual hunting-related expenditures. Hunting is one of the few activities that draws consumers out of the cities and suburbs to spend money in farm country – hunters spend \$9.2 billion per year on travel alone – so these losses hit rural communities particularly hard.

This Congress has introduced several bills to help address the loss of hunters (for example, the SHARE Act [H.R. 3668], the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council Advisory Committee Act [H.R. 1945], the Modernizing the Pittman-Robertson Fund for Tomorrow’s Needs Act of 2017 [S. 1613 and H.R. 2591], among others). As useful as many of these measures would be, for most of our partner agencies they pale in comparison to what a higher CRP acreage cap could achieve in terms of improving hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation. Again, these outcomes are existentially important in providing funds for state and federal habitat conservation programs whose benefits extend far beyond pheasants and other hunted species.

To adequately address these concerns, we urge you to support the following provisions in the upcoming farm bill:

- First and foremost, restore the CRP cap to previous authorization levels of 36-40 million acres; our analyses indicate this is the level of enrollment needed to grow hunter numbers from our current historic lows. 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 and climatic conditions. New acreage allocations should include routinely

scheduled general CRP signups with larger tracts critical for both wildlife production and hunting needs, as well as targeted continuous CRP enrollments (such as the successful CP-38's) to address multiple resource concerns.

- 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.

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, any of our member organizations, or Dr. Scott Taylor, our National Plan Coordinator (staylor@pheasantsforever.org; 402/417-8541). Thank you for service to the nation's natural resources, hunters, 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 (*denotes Management Board members; see www.nationalpheasantplan.org for more information):

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