

Pheasant News and Notes

February 2018



Trivia Question (mid-winter dreaming about warmer climes edition)

What's the southern-most county in the U.S. with a wild pheasant population?

Farm Bill and USDA News

According to AFWA's Andrew Schmidt and other sources, the House Ag committee is currently waiting on an official 10-year cost estimate of a draft Farm Bill from the Congressional Budget Office, and had indicated their intention of introducing legislation in February. But Dave Nomsen, our Management Board member from PF, reports rumors of the CBO scores not being available until March at the earliest, though it was still possible the House could introduce their bill in March or April. Dave also says another short term continuing resolution to keep the government running is likely once the current one expires February 8th (unless they shut down the government again, of course).

According to Politico, "agriculture lawmakers are under no illusions that additional funding will be available for the next farm bill, so they are driving toward one that won't increase the federal deficit." Although this seems to have been the assumption all along, it confirms that an increase in CRP funding will likely need to come from a cut elsewhere in farm bill programs.

Speaking of spending, [researchers at the Universities of Illinois and Ohio State report](#) that Conservation Title programs have done more than their fair share of deficit-reduction under the 2014 Farm Bill. Spending cuts to conservation programs that at the time were projected by the CBO to save \$4 billion over 10 years are now projected to save \$8.8 billion. The authors assumed those "savings" were the result of appropriators reducing program spending authority and moving it elsewhere. Boy, it's a good thing the Gulf dead zone went away, there are no more nitrates in our groundwater, and pheasants are super abundant, otherwise we probably could have used that money to address those problems as originally budgeted.

This month, Representative Rick Nolan (D-MN) introduced a marker bill called [the Crop Insurance Modernization Act of 2018](#). According to the Congressman, the bill "would expand access to risk management tools to currently underserved farmers (e.g., specialty crop, livestock, beginning, organic, and direct to consumer farmers) and create a stronger link between federal risk management programs and conservation priorities." That last bit is potentially interesting – the bill sets up a 5-year pilot program (limited to no more than 6 states with high insurance losses) to increase crop insurance premium subsidies for producers who commit "to practice conservation tillage, cover crops, or resource-conserving crop rotations" on their farms for at least 5 years. It also requires USDA to do compliance checks on 5% of farms participating in federal programs under conservation plans each year. As with all marker bills, at this point there's no telling what provisions will end up in the final legislation, but it is another indication of support for cover crops and crop rotations potentially beneficial to pheasants.

A link to [NRCS's "Pay for Success" website](#) also came over the bow last month. It describes a new(?) funding model the agency is touting as a way of attracting private capital to fund conservation projects, and provides a few examples associated with their Conservation Innovation Grant program. This seems

similar to a mitigation bank arrangement, but the website is a little thin on details. Off the top of my head, I couldn't think of a way to use this idea to generate more funding for pheasant habitat directly but there might be ways to do so indirectly using water quality and/or soil health deliverables. Take a look and see what you think.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Dr. Russ Mason, our Management Board member from the Michigan DNR, was recently named [Partner of the Year](#) by the Michigan State Council of Pheasants Forever. Congratulations, Russ!

Tom Keller (Technical Committee, Pennsylvania Game Commission) sent this recent photo from their first day of winter flushing counts on one of their Pheasant Restoration Areas. It's worth noting that these dedicated volunteers exist in a state where pen-raised birds now provide virtually all the pheasant hunting opportunity. Just a reminder of how powerful the species is socially, even in far from ideal circumstances. Nice Airedale! (Photo courtesy of Stefan Karkuff.)



As a reminder to the Technical Committee, Tom would also like to know if you are likely to attend this year's TC meeting in Pennsylvania to help make logistical decisions. If you haven't sent him a response yet (thkeller@pa.gov), please do so ASAP.

James Kurth, the acting Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, recently sent a memo to their Regional Directors regarding eligibility of expenses associated with the release of pen-raised birds for Pittman-Robertson reimbursements. As many of you know these expenses have not previously been eligible for reimbursements under the original wildlife restoration portion of the P-R law, but the memo states those expenses are now "eligible for funding under the Basic and Enhanced Hunter Education and Safety Program [of Pittman-Robertson] so long as the project proposals have an evaluation component to determine effectiveness in meeting the R3 objectives, and otherwise meet all of the relevant statutory and regulatory requirements necessary for approval." It will be interesting to see how this new ruling affects the number of states releasing birds, the number of birds they release, and what the "evaluation component" standards will be.

Last but not least, [Pheasant Fest](#) is this month. Hope to see you there!

Pheasants in the News

As I relayed earlier to the Technical Committee, a Nebraska partnership of state agency, university, and joint venture folks recently released [an online tool](#) designed to help pheasant managers visualize the benefits of landscape-scale habitat changes. Good work, Cornhuskers!

National Bird Day was January 5th, and National Geographic ran [a nice story on the importance of bird conservation](#) by novelist Jonathan Franzen with photos by Joel Sartore, including one of a Malayan peacock pheasant (no way can you run a photo spread of spectacular-looking birds and not include at least one pheasant).

This isn't pheasant news, but may affect national habitat management perspectives at some point: [Commentary in *Science*: Conserving honey bees does not help wildlife](#), plus [a National Public Radio story on the *Science* commentary](#), but then there's also [Honey bees pollinate a lot more than just crops](#)

This is an older story, but I checked the Finney County website on February 2nd and I don't think anyone got him:

[Million-dollar pheasant still at large](#)

Finally, from the sublime...

[Wounded Warrior Project Veterans Find Peer Support During Pheasant Hunt](#)

[Abandoned hunting dog rescued after retrieving pheasant for surprised hunter](#)

... to the ridiculous.

[United denies boarding to emotional support peacock](#)

"Emotional Support Peacock" would be a good name for a band, by the way.

Recent Literature

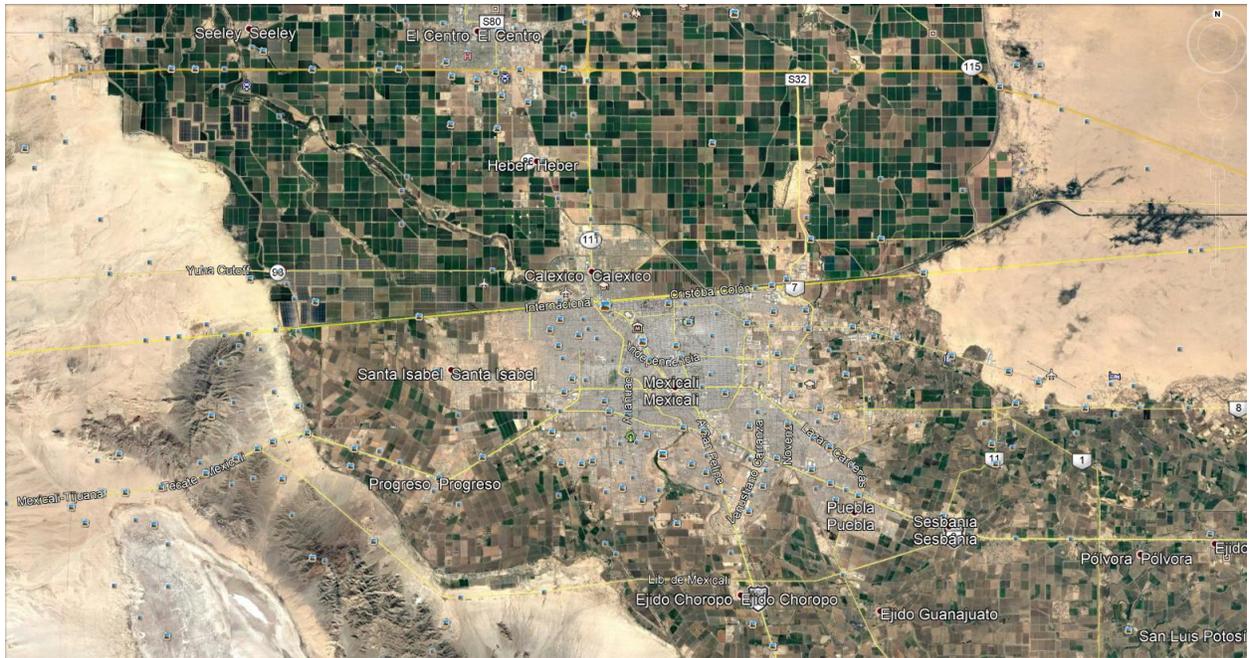
Here's a citation and direct link to the peer-reviewed paper describing the Nebraska pheasant habitat tool paper referenced above:

[Wszola, L. S., V. L. Simonsen, E. F. Stuber, C. R. Gillespie, L. N. Messinger, K. L. Decker, J. J. Lusk, C. F. Jorgensen, A. A. Bishop, and J. J. Fontaine. 2017. Translating statistical species-habitat models to interactive decision support tools. *PLoS ONE* 12\(12\):e0188244.](#)

Trivia answer

Hawai'i County, HI. Pheasants are found mostly in the north part of the big island, where year-round high temperatures (at Waimea) are in the low to mid 80's and annual rainfall is about 22 inches. I believe they are found on the state's other primary islands, as well.

As for the mainland, Robert Perez (Technical Committee, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department) says their Gulf Coast population is basically gone, so Eddy County, NM, Yuma County, AZ, and Imperial County, CA look to be about tied. The *average* July high temperatures in those county seats are 95, 107, and 107°F, respectively. Wild pheasants are also found just west and south of Yuma and Imperial counties around Mexicali, Mexico (see photo), where some commercial pheasant hunting is offered. Looks like intensive agriculture surrounded by desert on both sides of the international border, but a noticeable contrast in field conditions and/or crop types. ¡Viva la faisanes!



This update is brought to you by the National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan and Partnerships. Our mission is to foster science-based, socially-supported policies and programs that enhance wild pheasant populations, provide recreational opportunities to pheasant hunters, and support the economics and social values of communities. You can find us on the web at www.nationalpheasantplan.org.