

Pheasant News and Notes

April 2020



Trivia Question

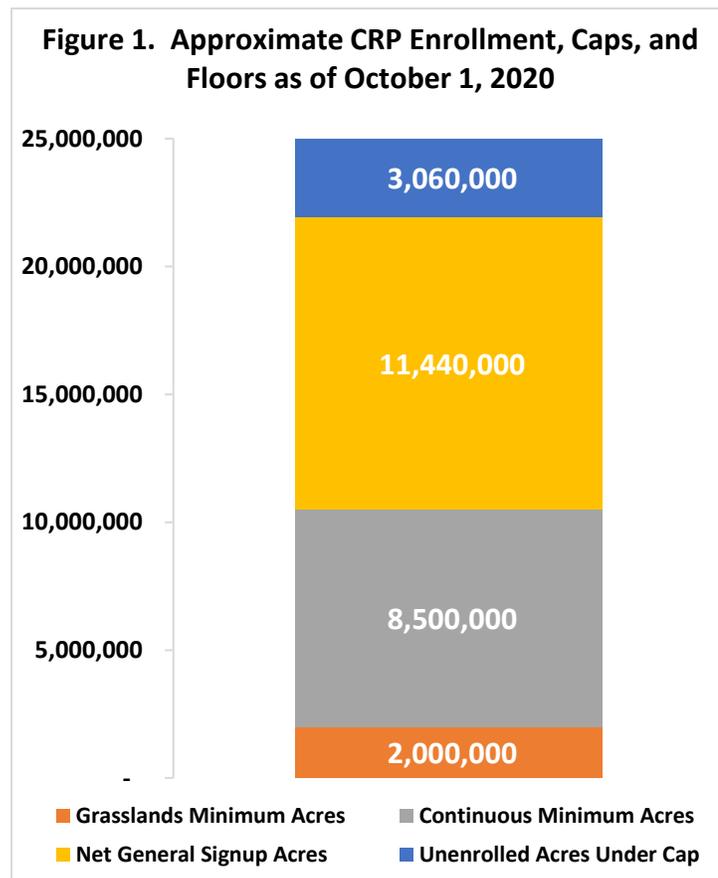
Do coronaviruses infect pheasants?

Farm Bill and USDA News

The 2019-2020 CRP general signup (“Signup 54”) application period concluded February 28th, and USDA recently [announced](#) the number of accepted offers and acres by state. Nationally, over 3.8 million acres were offered for enrollment and 3.4 million were accepted, for an acceptance rate of 89%. This rate is in line with most previous general signups held when there was plenty of room under the statutory acreage cap.

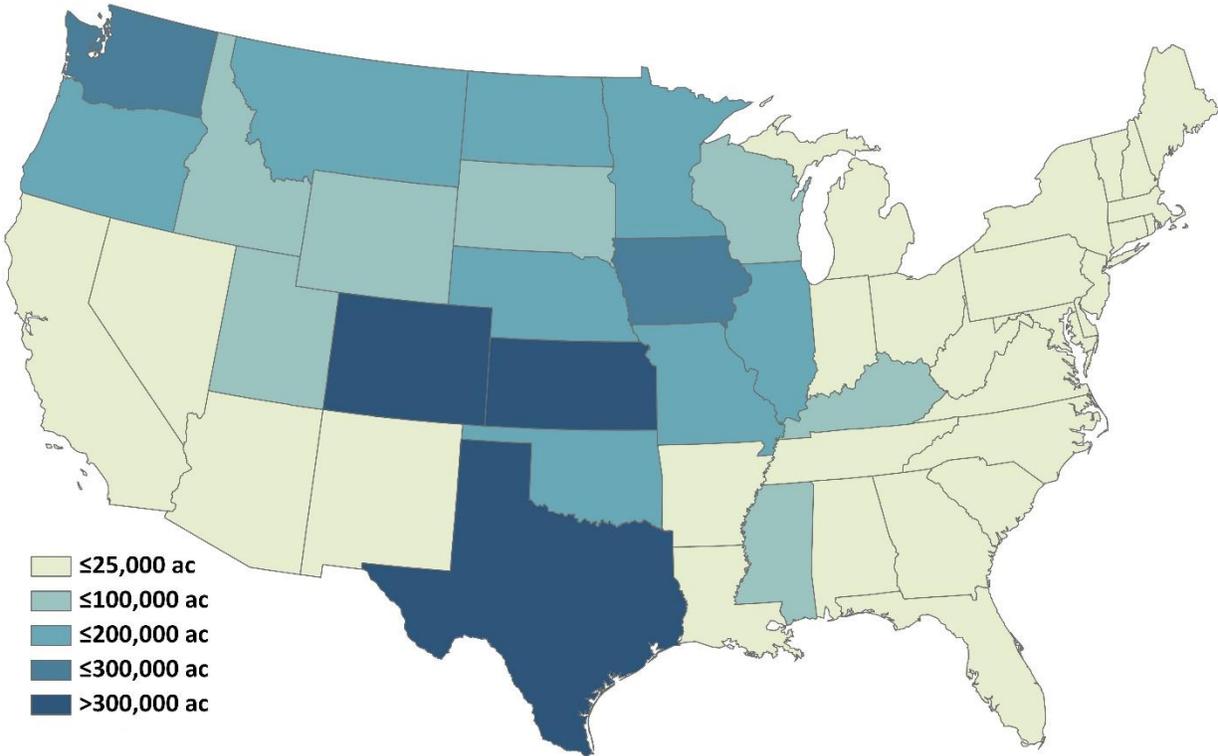
Figuring out how much room is left under the cap as of October 1 (when these new signup acres will come under contract, provided all the landowners are still willing to sign) is trickier under the new Farm Bill. Lawmakers specified acreage “floors” for continuous practices (8.5 million as of October 1) and the CRP Grasslands program (2 million), as well as the overall acreage cap (25 million). After accounting for the 4.70 and 0.66 million acres of general and continuous contracts expiring on September 30, this leaves about 3.06 million acres available between the cap and the categorical “floors” (Figure 1).

The figure assumes USDA will hold cap space open for CRP Grasslands and continuous contracts if enrollments are below their respective floors, as they currently are. Grasslands enrollment currently sits at less than one million acres, although [another signup is in progress](#). Continuous practice acres have a decent shot at reaching their floor given that some of the offers during this general signup were for continuous practices (including SAFE; see below) and there are still six months left in the fiscal year for qualifying landowners to enroll. Regardless, it’s a virtual lock that enrollments will lag 3-4 million acres under the statutory cap as of October 1.



But hey, let's not look a gift horse in the mouth. While not the blockbuster signup we were hoping for, we can look forward to thousands of new acres of habitat getting seeded next spring. As always, some states fared better than others (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Acres accepted by USDA as part of the 2019-2020 general CRP signup.



Most of the acres did end up in the pheasant states, so we can selfishly feel good about that (but our condolences to states in the eastern part of the range; as usual, they didn't fare so well). Beyond simple acceptances, we can also look at the net gains and losses of acres by accounting for contract expirations that will occur on September 30th. That map is more grim; many states did not gain enough new acres to offset losses (Figure 3). Note that these net estimates don't count additional Grasslands, SHIPP, and continuous offers that might come in between now and October 1st.

On a happier note, it appears that some states were able to boost their [State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement \(SAFE\) enrollments](#) quite a bit through this general signup (Figure 3). You'll recall that USDA prohibited landowners from enrolling in SAFE and many other wildlife-oriented continuous practices when they opened the continuous signup period in 2019. During the general signup, landowners were able to boost their EBI scores by offering to enroll in these higher-value practices, and it appears many adopted that strategy in some states. North Dakota did particularly well, achieving a more than 50% boost in their SAFE enrollment ([based on data as of the end of January](#)) through this signup. A number of other pheasant states will see an increase of at least 25%.

Figure 3. Approximate net change in state CRP enrollments as of October 1, 2020. Net change is defined as the acres of accepted offers during the 2019-2020 general signup minus the acres in contracts scheduled to expire on October 1. Net change does not account for new acres that will be enrolled in continuous, SHIPP, and CRP Grassland practices during February through September.

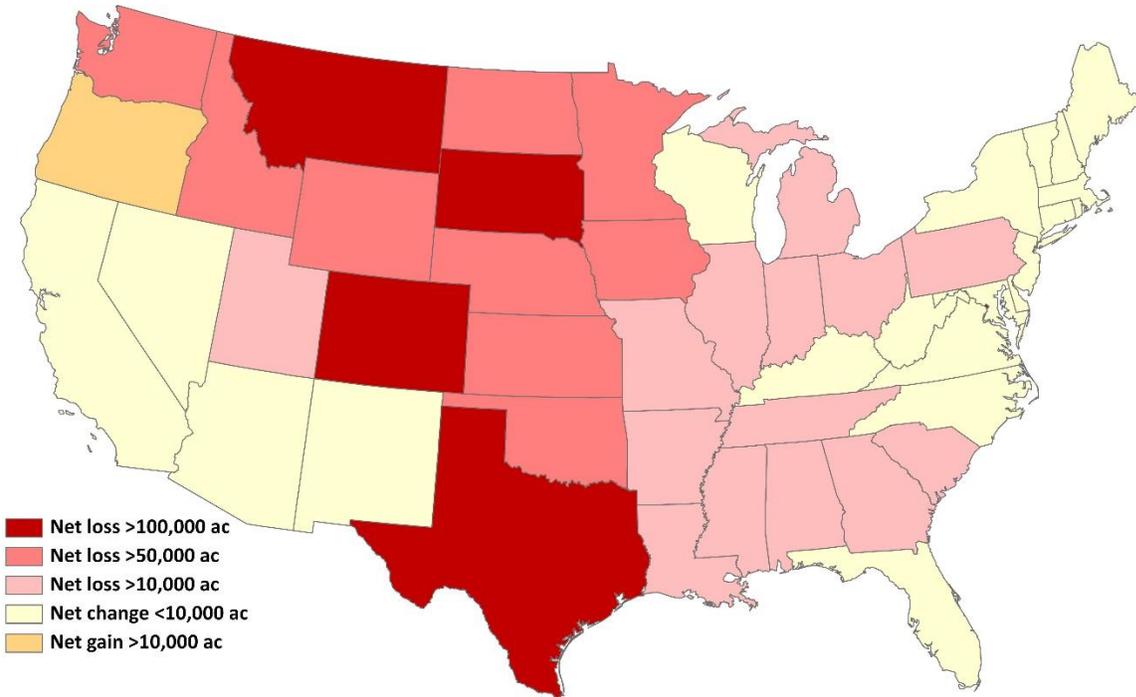
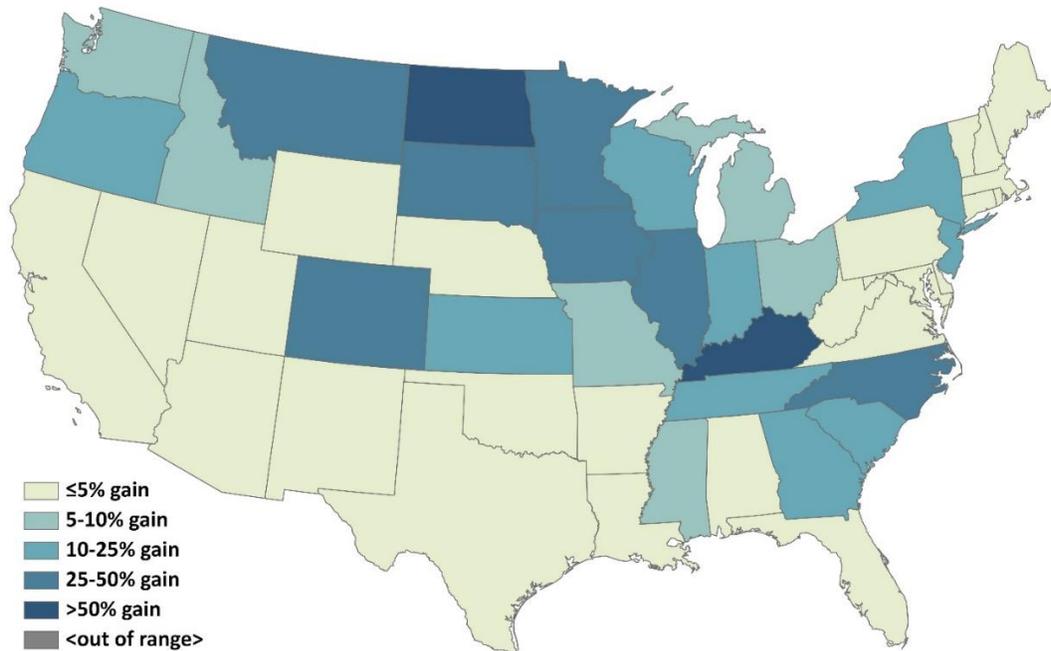


Figure 4. Acres of SAFE contract offers accepted during the 2019-2020 general signup, expressed as the percent gain from the state's standing SAFE enrollment as of January 2020. Estimates do not account for current SAFE contracts expiring prior to October 1st.



Finally, the NRCS just released an updated version of its [RCA Interactive Data Viewer](#) that allows users to access a treasure trove of data on USDA's conservation program activities. If you've got a few hours of quarantine time to kill, click away.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Spring has sprung and the roosters are crowing. Hopefully everyone can still get out and enjoy those parts of nature that aren't trying to kill us.

We had a good Management Board meeting last month, and thanks again to those who were able to participate. Dave Nomsen (PF) gave his excellent-as-usual Farm Bill update, and we had our regular funding discussion. The thick of the meeting, though, involved shaping the content of the National Plan revision. Since we are delving into some human dimensions topics that weren't part of the original plan, Board members had good suggestions about incorporating additional expertise to help us think critically about that material. It was particularly interesting to hear that a state was contemplating discontinuing their summer roadside survey because negative results were difficult to market to hunters. Some may see that as the tail wagging the dog, but in the era of serious small game hunter declines we may need to rethink the ways we have traditionally presented our biological data to the public. This is the subject of at least one of the work items proposed for the revised Plan.

Speaking of the Plan, I think I found an appropriate frontispiece for it:



**“Plans are useless, but
planning is indispensable.”**

—Dwight D. Eisenhower

I'm going to have to insist that this appears in the revision. It's too good not to use.

In other news from the North American conference, we heard details about the upcoming 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Related Recreation. This survey is run every five years and is co-sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Census Bureau. The contractor who will conduct the survey ([NORC at the University of Chicago](#)) explained they will no longer provide estimates of state-level metrics, but individual states can commission them to collect extra samples and provide state-level estimates for a fee (at least \$85,000). In my experience, the state-level hunting metrics in past surveys were either absent or suspect for many of our less populated member states due to small sample sizes, so discontinuing their presentation in the national survey is no big loss for most.

The eBird folks recently launched a nifty data summary tool. The bells and whistles are mostly constructed with migratory birds in mind, but galliforms are represented, too. You can check out their pheasant results [here](#).

Finally, AFWA released [this table](#) of estimated annual apportionments under the current version of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 3342), as well as the FY2019 State Wildlife Grant apportionment and the projected match needed under RAWA by each state. The match column in particular is an eye-opener.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Pheasant stamp bill passes Michigan House](#)

[Bill would relax rules on haying and grazing cover crops](#)

[Where have all the pheasants gone?](#)

[MacFarlane's workers are up to their \(ring\)necks in pheasants](#)

[Monarch butterflies drop 53% in Mexico wintering area](#)

[Western monarch butterfly numbers critically low for second straight year](#)

[Meet 'Wonderchicken,' the oldest modern bird who lived among dinosaurs](#)

Recent Literature

[Moulton, M. P., and W. P. Cropper, Jr. 2020. Problems of scale in assessing the role of propagule pressure in influencing introduction outcomes illustrated by Common Pheasant \(*Phasianus colchicus*\) introductions. *Biological Invasions* 22:1161-1168.](#)

[Zongxi Han, Liwen Xu, Menging Ren, Jie Sheng, Tianxin Ma, Junfeng Sun, Yan Zhao, Shengwang, Liu. 2020. Genetic, antigenic and pathogenic characterization of avian coronaviruses isolated from pheasants \(*Phasianus colchicus*\) in China. *Veterinary Microbiology* 240:10853.](#)

[Cabodevilla, X., N. J. Aebischer, R. Mougéot, M. B. Morales, and B. Arroyo. 2020. Are population changes of endangered little bustards associated with releases of red-legged partridges for hunting? A large-scale study from central Spain. *European Journal of Wildlife Research* 66:30.](#)

[Terhune, T. M., D. Caudill, V. H. Terhune, and J. A. Martin. 2020. A modified suture technique for attaching radiotransmitters to northern bobwhite chicks. *Journal of Wildlife Management* \(early online version\).](#)

[Blomberg, E. J., and C. A. Hagen. 2020. How many leks does it take? Minimum samples sizes for measuring local-scale conservation outcomes in Greater Sage-Grouse. *Avian Conservation and Ecology* 15\(1\):9.](#)

[Coates, P. S., S. T. O'Neil, B. E. Brussee, M. A. Ricca, P. J. Jackson, J. B. Dinkins, K. B. Howe, A. M. Moser, L. J. Foster, and D. J. Delehanty. 2020. Broad-scale impacts of an invasive native predator on a sensitive native prey species within the shifting avian community of the North American Great Basin. *Biological Conservation* 243:108409.](#)

[Dubey, A., M. T. Lewis, G. P. Dively, and K. A. Hamby. 2020. Ecological impacts of pesticide seed treatments on arthropod communities in a grain crop rotation. *Journal of Applied Ecology* \(early view\).](#)

Trivia Answer

Yes, with most symptomatic infections caused by pathogens in the genus *Gammacoronavirus*. A *Gammacoronavirus* causes avian infectious bronchitis (IB), an economically important disease in captive pheasants and other poultry. The current human pandemic is caused by a species in the genus *Betacoronavirus*. Be well, everyone!

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 <http://nationalpheasantplan.org>.