

Pheasant News and Notes

July 2021



Trivia Question

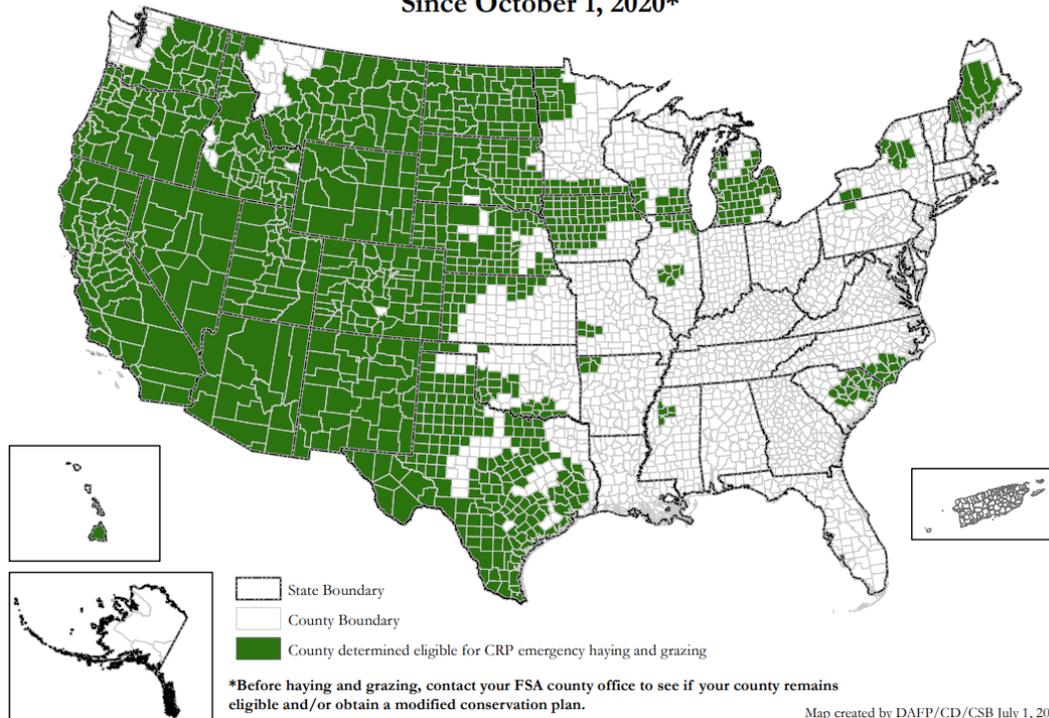
Based on the habitat model developed for the revised National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan, which of the 24 states included in the Plan depend on CRP the most and the least for their pheasant production?

Farm Bill and USDA News

As we mentioned last month, FSA reopened the continuous and general signup periods through August 6th and July 23rd, respectively. Grain prices are still high but 15-20% below their May peaks, so that trend and the drought in the Northern Plains and western states may encourage a bit more interest in applying.

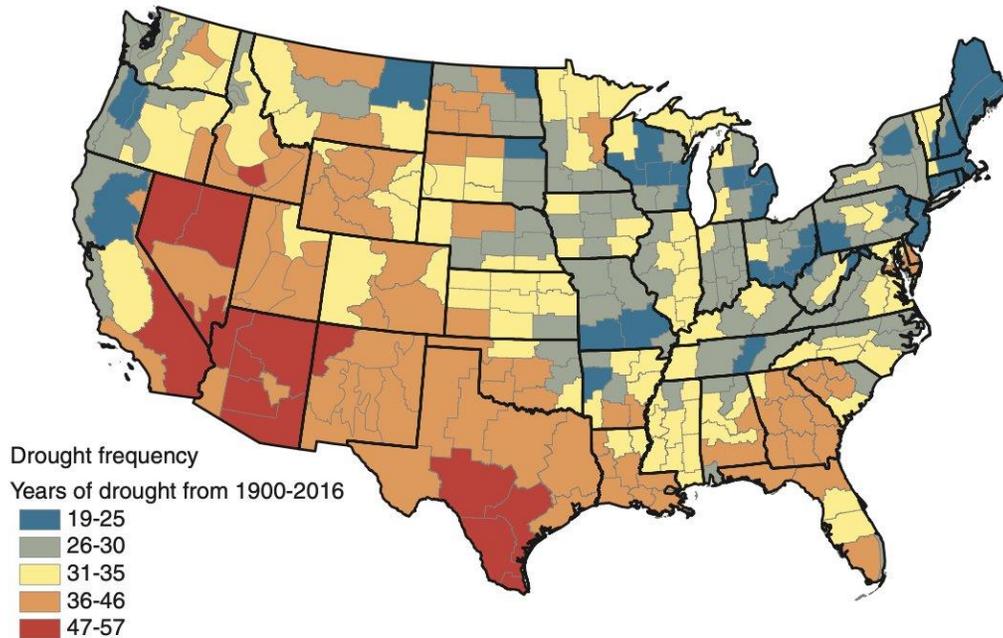
Drought cuts both ways, though. CRP in a big swath of the pheasant range is open for emergency haying and grazing. Under previous farm bills, emergency haying and grazing was limited to roughly half of the cover or forage available, but those limitations went away in the 2018 Farm Bill. Emergency haying is still not allowed during the primary nesting season, but 100% of the field can be hayed or grazed at full stocking rates outside the PNS. All the permutations of forage harvesting, timing, and payment reductions can be found in USDA-FSA's [fact sheet](#).

Counties Eligible for CRP Emergency Haying and Grazing
Since October 1, 2020*



Speaking of drought, Jim Inglis passed along the following long-term risk chart from the University of Illinois' Farm Policy News:

Drought risk reflects frequency of severe drought and varies regionally, 1900-2016



Note: Drought frequency is the number of years when at least 1 summer month (June, July, or August) had moderate or worse drought (PMDI \leq -2.00).
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using historical data by climate district from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Palmer Modified Drought Index (PMDI).

Jim also passed along the [notice](#) that USDA will allow producers to establish a cover crop on insured prevented plant acres and then to hay, graze, or chop the cover crop for silage and still receive 100% of their prevented planting payment. The rule had been in place on a short-term basis but is now available for the 2021 crop year and beyond. The change is meant to speed adoption of cover crop use by producers.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

A review draft of the revised National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan is now in the hands of the Management Board. The Board will meet Monday, July 26th at noon Central Time to discuss the draft, particularly its initial recommendation for a 45-million-acre national CRP enrollment. Thanks to all the Technical Committee members for their hard work on the document to date, and they are welcome to attend the Management Board discussion online.

I attended the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) Directors Meeting last week, where I presented a brief update on our partnership's activities. Pheasant-relevant items among my meeting notes included:

- The three-day meeting was chaired by Management Board member Keith Warnke of Wisconsin – well done, Keith!
- Jim Douglas (Management Board, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission) has announced his retirement as Director effective this fall. Jim was one of the earliest proponents of our National Plan partnership and the Plan Coordinator position, for which he did much of the legwork to secure the initial state funding commitments. We thank Jim for his foundational work for our partnership and wish him nothing but happiness in his retirement.
- Terry Steinwand also announced his retirement as Director of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, effective later this month. Terry was also an early partnership supporter, and we wish him well.
- Joseph Lautenbach (Technical Committee, Ohio DNR) and Dave Kohler (former Management Board member for Ohio) were part of the Ohio Birding Academy Team that won the MAFWA Excellence in Conservation Award, and Mike Parker (private lands biologist for the Michigan DNR) won the Spirit of the Shack Award – congratulations to Joseph, Dave, and Mike!
- Kurt Thiede (formerly of the Wisconsin DNR) has been hired to replace Jen Mock Schaeffer as MAFWA's Government Affairs Director.
- MAFWA is exploring the possibility of hiring or otherwise supporting an R3 Coordinator but hasn't yet determined how best to do so.
- North Dakota is starting a new project to facilitate electronic (online) posting of private land, such that hunters can identify who to contact to gain access permission for individual parcels.
- The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) is expected to be introduced in the Senate on July 12th with bipartisan sponsorship. The House's counterpart currently has over 60 sponsors. If passed, the annual RAWA allocation to MAFWA states would be \$237 million.
- The MAFWA Directors passed a recommendation to 1) support and encourage state agencies to commit to using lead alternatives in their own programs, events, and initiatives when applicable, and 2) develop a strategic approach to address the needs, challenges, and limitations surrounding lead alternatives for both angling and hunting.
- The Directors also approved creation of a MAFWA Human Dimensions Committee.

Taylor Shirley defended her Master's thesis from Iowa State University last month. You will recall that Taylor was the student working on pheasant use of cover crops under Dr. Adam Janke. Taylor and Adam have been great about presenting most of their results to us well ahead of the defense so there were not a lot of surprises, but the highlights included:

- Cover crops on their southeast Iowa study areas were mostly cereal rye planted after corn or soybean harvest in the fall, and then terminated prior to corn or soybean planting the following spring.
- Cover crops in this system showed little use by nesting pheasants, with only four nests found. None of the four was successful, though none was destroyed by farming equipment.
- By the end of the study, about 15-20% of cropland in the study county used cover crops. Cover crop availability around crow-count sample points and roadside brood routes (defined by 400-m buffers around both) had little predicted effect on crowing male abundance or the probability of detecting broods.
- Though the present cover crop system showed limited potential for pheasant production, other systems (particularly if the cover crop is grown for seed) could provide value.
- Perennial grasslands are still the most important cover for pheasant production.

Thanks again to Taylor and Adam (as well as the Iowa DNR, who provided funding) for producing some very interesting and useful results.

Finally, a recent paper suggests CRP was negatively associated with pheasant abundance at the local scale in the southern High Plains – see the Pavlacky et al. (2021) citation below.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Conditions shaping up for a good pheasant season in Iowa](#)

[North Dakota's spring pheasant count similar to last year](#)

[Mow those ditches early – the pheasants are fine, says Governor](#)

[Pheasants 101: the key is habitat](#)

[Montana proposes pen-raised pheasants as a hunter recruitment tool](#)

[UK television host reveals his farm's biggest disaster – wasabi lost to pheasants](#)

[Will high prices hinder USDA's CRP goal?](#)

[Solar leases more popular than carbon contracts among farmers](#)

Recent Literature

[Pavlacky, Jr., D. C., C. A. Hagen, A. M. Bartuszevige, R. Iovanna, T. L. George, and D. E. Naugle. 2021. *Scaling up private land conservation to meet recovery goals for grassland birds. Conservation Biology \(early online version\).*](#)

[Yeiser, J. M., J. J. Morgan, D. L. Baxley, R. B. Chandler, and J. A. Martin. 2021. *Optimizing conservation in species-specific agricultural landscapes. Conservation Biology \(early online version\).*](#)

[Lawrence, A. J., S. A. Carleton, W. R. Gould, and C. T. Nichols. 2021. *Lesser prairie-chicken survival in varying densities of energy development. Journal of Wildlife Management \(early online version\).*](#)

[Rosche, S. B., C. E. Moorman, A. J. Kroeger, K. Pacifici, J. G. Jones, and C. S. Deperno. 2021. *Effects of prescribed fire on northern bobwhite nesting ecology.*](#)

Trivia Answer

Our model estimated Missouri had the highest percentage (80%) of their recent pheasant production (i.e., successful nests during 2015-19) occurring in CRP, whereas New York had the lowest (5%). These are our best guesses, but keep in mind the famous George E. P. Box quote that all models are wrong but some are useful.

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>.