

Pheasant News and Notes

June 2018



Trivia Question

What pheasant thesis resulted from a fight between long-time colleagues Aldo Leopold and Paul Errington?

Farm Bill and USDA News

The big news last month was of course the rise and at least temporary fall of H.R. 2, the House's first attempt at a 2018 Farm Bill. Its failure was blamed on unified Democratic opposition to the bill's new work requirements for SNAP ("food stamp") recipients, Freedom Caucus members looking for leverage on an immigration vote (and for some, an opportunity to trim subsidies), and a few moderate Republicans also concerned about the new SNAP provisions. You can find an interesting account of the SNAP issue and the geographic distribution of Republican "no" votes [here](#).

In the days leading up to the vote, the conservation community led a charge to defeat an amendment that would have kept the CRP cap at 24 million acres instead of the 29 million in the introduced bill. That charge was successful, and the amendment was withdrawn before a vote was taken. Although some of the House bill's CRP provisions were worrisome (particularly the cap on rental rates at 80% of the county average), a 29 million-acre cap would certainly be an improvement. The bill's failure increases the uncertainty regarding a hike in the cap, particularly if the Senate next brings a bill forward. Although Senator John Thune's (R-SD) marker bill would increase the cap to 30 million acres, it doesn't appear the Senate Ag Committee's leadership is as interested as the House's (particularly ranking member Colin Peterson [D-MN]) in increasing the cap by a significant amount.

What happens next, and in what order, is up in the air. House Ag Chairman Mike Conaway (R-TX) is said to be pushing for another vote as soon as the immigration vote desired by the Freedom Caucus happens, and the deadline for another vote on H.R. 2 in its current form is June 22nd. The Senate has remained focused on delivering a bipartisan bill, and Ag Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS) recently suggested a committee mark-up as early as June 6th. It's certainly possible the Senate will beat the House to the punch, but then again, all kinds of things are still possible.

In USDA news, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced the appointment of Richard Fordyce to serve as Administrator of the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Mr. Fordyce most recently served as State Executive Director for FSA in Missouri, and was director of the Missouri Department of Agriculture from 2013 to 2017. A note of endorsement from a member of the Missouri conservation community was circulated among the AFWA farm bill group, so hopefully wildlife interests can forge a good working relationship with him and the rest of the CRP delivery staff. (And speaking of AFWA, Agriculture Policy Program Manager Andrew Schmidt recently accepted a policy job with Ducks Unlimited, so if you've dreamed of moving to D.C. and working on policy, polish up your resumé.)

Finally, both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees voted to move FY2019 agriculture appropriations bills to their full chambers. Both bills give a small bump in funding to NRCS, and the House bill also bumps up FSA's budget a bit. The Senate bill specifies no increase in FSA funding over

FY2018, but the Committee’s report language includes the following: “The Secretary is strongly encouraged to, within the total acreage made available for enrollment in the conservation reserve program and without reducing the periodic availability of general signup, enroll, to the maximum extent practicable, acreage for activities included in the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement practice or other similar administratively established wetland and habitat practices that benefit priority fish and wildlife species identified in State, regional, and national conservation initiatives with a priority for initiatives that provide large blocks of cover ideal for wildlife nesting.” Amen, brother! You can find the rest of the Senate committee’s report recommendations [here](#), and the House’s [here](#). I don’t believe floor votes have been scheduled yet for either bill.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range



Your Plan Coordinator spent an interesting few days at the MAFWA Private Lands Working Group meeting last month. The meeting was hosted by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in Williston, which is up in the northwest corner near the heart of the Bakken oil field. Our field tour included a site enrolled in NDGFD’s public access and habitat improvement programs where drilling occurred following enrollment (above, with flaming gas vent in the middle distance). Surface and mineral rights are often not held by the same people, and holders of mineral rights may build surface structures necessary to access and transport the oil. At the above site, the mineral rights-holders had built a pipeline extending from the well pad that exposed a lot of glacial rock, making future haying of that strip of land virtually impossible. These types of challenges were present on some of their public lands, as well. We also got a tour of an active oil rig (a big red, white, and blue one, no less).

Some take-aways from the meeting included:

- General concern about the House’s Farm Bill proposals, particularly the 80% rental rate cap, the step-up of CRP Grasslands acreage, haying and grazing provisions, reduced cost-share payments, and the zeroing-out of VPA-HIP’s baseline funding if a new bill fails to pass before October 1st.

- North Dakota’s precision agriculture partnership positions seem to be working well, and so far, over 40% of the acres they’ve analyzed with landowner cost and production data are not turning a profit. This obviously creates opportunities to enroll those low-performing lands into conservation programs or convert them to alternative land uses like grazing.
- Ohio recently developed a CRP mid-contract management practice of interplanting forbs using plugs (i.e., planting forb seedlings) in situations where soil disturbance would result in noxious weed problems.
- Results of a landscape-scale study suggest oil extraction may not have much effect on waterfowl productivity; this work will be published soon.
- The nice young man who directs the horizontal drilling sensors on the oil rig at right makes about \$300 per hour, and he was not the highest paid worker on site. Our tour guide said work on the rig supported about 80 families – some apparently very well. No wonder this part of the world looks like a pincushion from space.



I also attended the National R3 Symposium last month in Lincoln, Nebraska, which was organized by the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports. There were about 350 attendees from various state and federal wildlife agencies, NGOs, and outdoor-related industries. Some of the presentation topics (all in the context of R3, of course) included organizational change and business practices, celebrating advancements, data and research, strategic partnerships, marketing, and mobilizing sportsmen. While the importance of hunting access was mentioned several times, the concept of habitat conservation as a foundational R3 issue never really came up. Virtually all the organizations represented in the room are also working on habitat issues, so maybe it was understood without being spoken. I hope so, at least. You can check out the Council’s webpage for the National R3 Plan [here](#).

As a visual palate-cleanser from the oil field photos, here’s one sent by Tech Committee member Tom Keller. His caption: “As the sun peeks over the mountains, Pennsylvania biologists conduct annual pheasant crowing counts to monitor populations.” Thanks, Tom!



Pheasants in the Media

[Song from the distant past, a new fossil pheasant from China preserves a super-elongated windpipe](#)
[700 pheasants die from botulism in Australia](#)
[Study shows population decline of endangered pheasant in China](#)

Recent Literature

Taylor, J. S., T. R. Bogenschutz, and W. R. Clark. 2018. Pheasant responses to U.S. cropland conversion programs: a review and recommendations. *Wildlife Society Bulletin*. In press. (This was accepted for publication on May 20th; I'll send a e-copy to all Tech Committee members once the publisher makes a pdf available.)

[Laskowski, J. A., G. C. Bachman, and J. J. Fontaine. 2017. Severe drought impacts female pheasant physiology in southwest Nebraska. *Prairie Naturalist* 49:57-65.](#)

Dwight, I. A., P. S. Coates, S. T. Stoute, C. G. Senties-Cue, R. V. Gharpure, and M. E. Pitesky. 2018. Serologic surveillance of wild and pen-reared ring-necked pheasants (*Phasianus colchicus*) as a method of understanding disease reservoirs. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* 54:414-418.

St. Charles, K., A. Ssematimba, S. Malladi, P. J. Bonney, E. Linskens, M. Culhane, T. J. Goldsmith, D. A. Halvorson, and C. J. Cardona. 2018. Avian influenza in the United States commercial upland gamebird industry: An analysis of selected practices as potential exposure pathways and surveillance system data reporting. *Avian Diseases* 62. In press.

Trivia answer

Cyril Kabat's "Reading breeding history from pheasant ovaries" (1947 M.S. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison). The following story comes from UW's emeritus professor Stan Temple:

"In 1941 Cy, a Milwaukee native, was an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin majoring in Agronomy when he first encountered Aldo Leopold. For a course assignment in Agricultural Journalism, he interviewed Leopold about the work he and his students were doing at Faville Grove. Cy must have made a good impression because Leopold invited him to attend his weekly seminars on wildlife management. In 1942 Cy heard Leopold talk about Bobwhite Quail research at Prairie du Sac that had been initiated by Paul Errington in 1929 and was continued by several of Leopold's students. Leopold asked if Cy would be interested in working on the project, and in 1942 he began fieldwork on quail and was accepted into Leopold's graduate program in 1943. At the time, Cy was Leopold's only student in residence, as the rest were on leave from their studies to serve in World War II. That led Cy to another project covering for Leopold's absent graduate students who had been studying Ring-necked Pheasants at the University of Wisconsin Arboretum. While the plan was for Cy to focus on analyzing the Prairie du Sac quail data for his thesis, an unexpected hurdle emerged. Leopold and Errington had a major falling out over the analysis and write up of the quail work on which they had collaborated. The data Cy would need for his thesis became an issue. Leopold would eventually resolve the disagreement through a forceful series of letters to Errington defending Cy, but Kabat would eventually write his thesis on the pheasant research instead."

A little reminder that our professional heroes were people, too. Have a great June!

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>.