

Pheasant News and Notes

January 2019



Trivia Question

In what 1967 novel does the following appear?

We left the house with him still eating the sandwich. The store was three blocks away, on the other side of a field covered with heavy yellow grass. There were many pheasants in the field. Fat with summer they barely flew away when we came up to them...

My friend led the way across the field. One of the pheasants didn't even bother to fly. He ran across the field in front of us like a feathered pig.

Farm Bill and USDA News

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 is now the law of the land. Thanks to Todd Bogenschutz (Management Board and Technical Committee, Iowa DNR), Andrew Schmidt of DU, and other members of AFWA's Agricultural Conservation Committee, we have [a nice summary of the law's conservation provisions](#) available. Below are a few highlights.

Regarding the Conservation Reserve Program, the national acreage cap will incrementally increase to 27 million acres by FY2023, with 2 million of those acres reserved for Grassland CRP enrollments. That increase was paid for by lowering general and continuous practice rental payments to 85% and 90% of the estimated county average rental rates, respectively, for new contracts. The payment limitations will help ensure that Congress' intent to direct CRP enrollments toward relatively marginal farmlands will be realized, but their effect on future landowner participation is uncertain, particularly when crop prices rebound. It is certain, however, that we can expect to see different effects in different parts of the country; in theory, counties with more uniform soil rental rates should see relatively fewer interested landowners. The new law does make participation more attractive by liberalizing the conditions under which enrolled tracts may be hayed or grazed, with prohibitions during the primary nesting season remaining mostly intact.

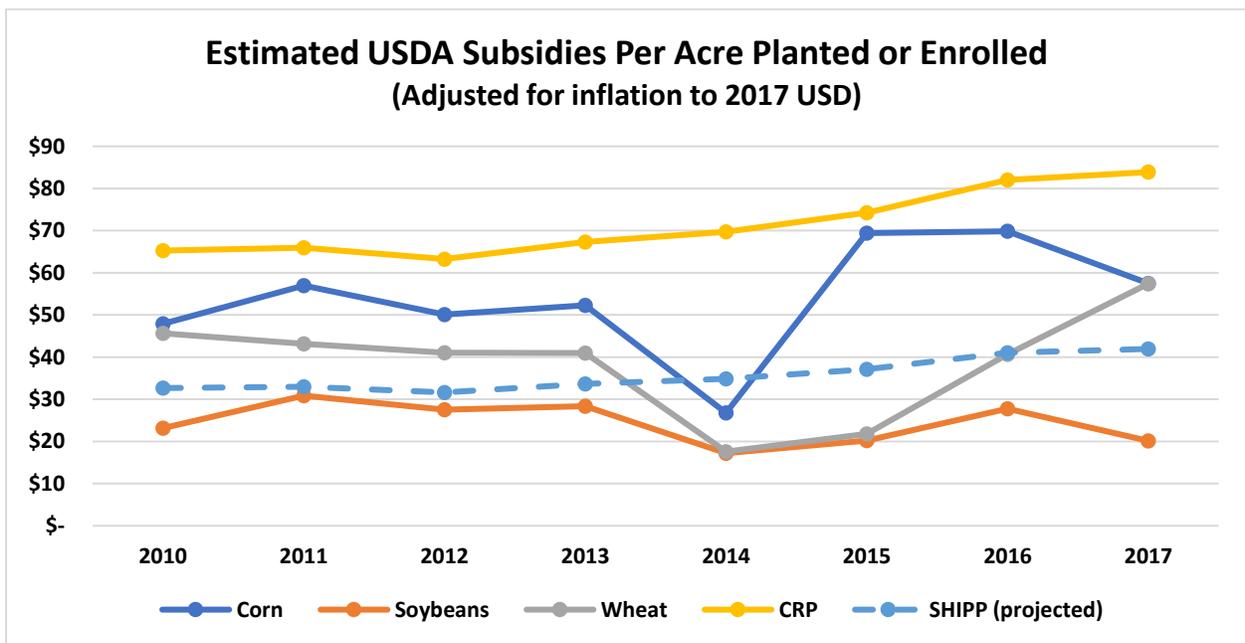
Lawmakers also added a provision to help ensure the distribution of new enrollments among the states hews to that of the recent past. The USDA Secretary must allocate 60% of all CRP acres available each year in proportion to each state's average share of the national enrollment during 2007-2016. There's more than one way to interpret the statutory language, but I think it means that if a state had an average of, say, 5% of the national enrolled acreage during 2007-2016, that state would be allocated 5% of those acres made available each year under this system (which would consist of 60% of the total available acres available for distribution under the cap). The remaining 40% of the available acres apparently wouldn't be subject to this quota and would be distributed some other way (e.g., the lowest cost per EBI point nationally, maybe). If my interpretation is correct, the proportional allocation implications for each state are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Historic (2007-2016) and potential CRP acreage distribution targets by state.

		Proportion	Target
	2007-2016	of avg national	allotment per
STATE	avg enrollment	enrollment	100,000 ac available nationally
ALABAMA	362,204	0.012	1,242
ALASKA	21,346	0.001	73
ARIZONA	-	0.000	-
ARKANSAS	239,938	0.008	823
CALIFORNIA	105,852	0.004	363
COLORADO	2,124,251	0.073	7,283
CONNECTICUT	126	0.000	0
DELAWARE	6,366	0.000	22
FLORIDA	52,244	0.002	179
GEORGIA	298,857	0.010	1,025
HAWAII	484	0.000	2
IDAHO	664,680	0.023	2,279
ILLINOIS	988,488	0.034	3,389
INDIANA	268,958	0.009	922
IOWA	1,670,072	0.057	5,726
KANSAS	2,594,054	0.089	8,894
KENTUCKY	322,362	0.011	1,105
LOUISIANA	307,641	0.011	1,055
MAINE	14,536	0.000	50
MARYLAND	74,645	0.003	256
MASSACHUSETTS	24	0.000	0
MICHIGAN	208,544	0.007	715
MINNESOTA	1,476,665	0.051	5,063
MISSISSIPPI	816,099	0.028	2,798
MISSOURI	1,239,369	0.042	4,249
MONTANA	2,401,281	0.082	8,233
NEBRASKA	1,003,252	0.034	3,440
NEVADA	146	0.000	1
NEW HAMPSHIRE	44	0.000	0
NEW JERSEY	2,316	0.000	8
NEW MEXICO	481,973	0.017	1,652
NEW YORK	49,610	0.002	170
NORTH CAROLINA	108,007	0.004	370
NORTH DAKOTA	2,269,493	0.078	7,781
OHIO	315,372	0.011	1,081
OKLAHOMA	839,261	0.029	2,877
OREGON	543,946	0.019	1,865
PENNSYLVANIA	196,445	0.007	674
PUERTO RICO	1,491	0.000	5
RHODE ISLAND	28	0.000	0
SOUTH CAROLINA	141,450	0.005	485
SOUTH DAKOTA	1,116,528	0.038	3,828
TENNESSEE	190,424	0.007	653
TEXAS	3,393,750	0.116	11,635
UTAH	178,155	0.006	611
VERMONT	2,658	0.000	9
VIRGINIA	59,377	0.002	204
WASHINGTON	1,416,326	0.049	4,856
WEST VIRGINIA	5,821	0.000	20
WISCONSIN	370,971	0.013	1,272
WYOMING	221,799	0.008	760
U.S.	29,167,729	1.000	100,000

Also added into the CRP subtitle was a pilot Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP), which is essentially a shorter-term (3-5 year contracts), cheaper (annual payments at 50% of county soil rental rates, no cost share for cover establishment), less restrictive (no payment reduction for haying and grazing outside the primary nesting season) version of CRP. The SHIPP pilot is limited to 50,000 acres within the Prairie Pothole states. If you are not fortunate enough to work in a qualifying state, there are still a couple of potential benefits of the pilot for you: 1) a successful and popular initial offering through the pilot will likely mean a more widely available program in the next Farm Bill, and perhaps more importantly, 2) the pilot requires USDA to create a report estimating the conservation value of enrolled land, as well as the estimated savings from reduced commodity title outlays (commodity payments, crop insurance subsidies and payments, etc.). This sort of accounting will, I think, provide a powerful model to assess the benefits of SHIPP and hopefully conservation programs of all types in 2023 and beyond.

To take a peek at what this analysis might show, I updated the chart I presented a few months ago depicting USDA subsidies (as calculated by the [Environmental Working Group](#) from USDA data) per acre planted or enrolled (as estimated by USDA), assuming SHIPP would cost 50% of what CRP has historically cost on a per-acre basis. (You can read my other caveats about using these data [here](#).)



If these projections come to pass, SHIPP subsidy costs will likely compare favorably to those for several of our common crops, which was no doubt known ahead of time by SHIPP proponents.

Finally, the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Improvement Program (VPA-HIP) was funded at \$50 million over the life of the 5-year Farm Bill, and application procedures for the funds have been streamlined. Language in the new bill also promotes the use of precision agriculture approaches, cover crops, more diverse crop rotations, and native plants in program seedings.

So in sum, no, we didn't get the 40 million acres of CRP we asked for, but it seems clear that lawmakers did receive the message that more acres of habitat were needed and made an honest effort to respond. Sadly, hope for a larger CRP acreage cap increase seemed to go out the window early on when lawmakers from both parties agreed to keep funding for the conservation title flat at best. This was not

surprising given the passage of the costly tax reform law and other budgetary increases that preceded most of the serious Farm Bill deliberations. It's probably unwise to think this flat-at-best funding constraint will change in future farm bills, but hope springs eternal.

Now what? USDA will need to translate provisions in the new law into policies, regulations, and preferences, so we'll need to work with our partners to provide input on these processes. Also, we can anticipate several questions we will be asked prior to the next round of Farm Bill deliberations in 2023; a few that come to mind are:

1. Assuming a) SHIPP proves popular with landowners, and b) we can enroll two acres of SHIPP for roughly the same cost as one acre of CRP, does our partnership support trading CRP acres for more SHIPP acres nationally, regionally, or not at all?
2. Were states that desired SHIPP enrollments but were not included in the pilot area able to create similar habitats through EQIP or CSP incentive packages at a similar cost, and if so, is this a better approach than trading CRP acres for SHIPP acres?
3. Did the new rules on CRP haying and grazing negatively affect pheasant habitats, and if not, can we advocate going further in reducing CRP costs by making it more of a working lands program?
4. Has the increased adoption of cover crops a) benefitted pheasants by providing more nesting, brood-rearing, and/or escape habitat, b) been detrimental to pheasants by reducing the availability of waste grain in fall and winter, or c) created a combination of benefits and drawbacks that vary by region and cropping system?
5. How can precision agriculture approaches best be used to promote pheasant habitat, and what farm bill provisions can be used to better incentivize those approaches in the future?

The Management Board and Technical Committee will need to discuss which of these (or other) questions are our highest priorities, what new science might be needed to reliably answer them, and how we can best collaborate on solutions by 2022.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Your Plan Coordinator submitted the final proposal for our multi-Joint Venture pheasant habitat modeling project to USDA-FSA last month. At FSA's request, we identified an initial group of states (ND, SD, NE, KS, IA, and MN) to model first, with a second group (MT, CO, OK, NM, and TX) to follow. This will make it easier to show some tangible results earlier in the process and help secure funding in subsequent years. The budget request includes \$25,000 per year to assist participating states with collecting some new crow count data along established Breeding Bird Survey routes (participation by the states is voluntary, of course). We haven't received final word on funding yet, and obviously won't until after the government shutdown is over.

In other news, the Michigan DNR launched a new "Adopt-a-Game-Area" program last month aimed at grassland conservation. Through the program, individuals and organizations can donate money toward grassland conservation projects on selected state-owned areas across the state and receive recognition for their donations through a number of outlets. You can read more about the program [here](#).

The South Dakota Habitat Conservation Foundation, South Dakota State University, and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced the creation of a new \$1 million project entitled "[Every Acre Counts](#)." The goal of the project is to use precision agriculture approaches to establish conservation uses on marginal croplands, and to document the benefits that subsequently

accrue. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, as well as Pheasants Forever, were also heavily involved in the project's conception. You can watch the public announcement of the project [here](#).

In R3 news, the Missouri Department of Conservation recently produced a [small game hunting guide](#) designed for those new to the sport. Looks like a good reference that others could link to.

Finally, Josh Beuth has taken a new position and is no longer Rhode Island's representative on the Technical Committee. No word yet on his replacement. We wish Josh well in his new endeavors.

Pheasants in the Media

This one is from 2016, but seems appropriate to include given President George H. W. Bush's passing last month:

[Pheasant hunt elicits presidential tale](#)

In an even more auspicious small game hunting feat, 41 was the only U.S. President [to claim to have caught a chipmunk on a flyrod](#). I'm no John Meachum, but that's my guess anyway.

[Pheasants Forever's "Farm Bill and Beyond" podcast](#)

[CRP proponents worry lower payments will hurt East Idaho land conservation](#)

[New Jersey to close state pheasant farm](#)

[Current, former Steelers take part in Brett Keisel's annual pheasant hunt](#)

[Currents: a short interview with Pheasants Forever CEO Howard Vincent](#)

[Farm Bill gives birds a boost](#)

[Why we suck at recruiting new hunters, why it matters, and how you can fix it](#)

And after only a month in residence, Meghan Markel drops off my favorite princess list, now replaced by Kate Middleton:

[Kate Middleton reportedly went pheasant shooting the day after Meghan Markle, who hates hunting, went home](#)

Recent Literature

[Perkins, R., C. W. Boal, and C. B. Dabbert. 2018. Raptor selection of captive reared and released Galliform birds. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 42:713-715.](#)

[Hohbein, R. R., and C. J. Conway. 2018. Pitfall traps: a review of methods for estimating arthropod abundance. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 42:597-606.](#)

[Blackburn, T. M., and K. J. Gaston. 2018. Abundance, biomass and energy use of native and alien breeding birds in Britain. *Biological Invasions* 20:3563-3573.](#)

[Stamberov, P., C. Zhelev, T. Todorov, S. Ivanova, T. Mehmedov, I. Manev, and E. Taneva. 2018. Epidemiological data on lead tissue concentration in game birds induced by lead pellets. *Agriculture for Life, Life for Agriculture Conference Proceedings* 1:479-484.](#)

Trivia Answer

Trout Fishing in America, by Richard Brautigan. Just a heads up – this is not a book about fishing, although the characters in it sometimes fish. If you like Salvador Dali paintings you might just enjoy *Trout Fishing in America*, but probably not as much as Peter Eastman, Jr. from Carpinteria, California, enjoyed it, given that he legally changed his name to “Trout Fishing in America” in 1994. And he’s apparently not the only person named after the book. If you think that’s too absurd to be true, [you’d be wrong](#).

Brautigan, who died under unfortunate circumstances in 1984, was part of a group of authors (including Jim Harrison, Russell Chatham, and Tom McGuane, among others) whose mutual sporting exploits were often referenced in their respective non-fiction writings. If you like to fish and are looking for some reading material to help get you through winter, *Silent Seasons*, which includes short stories by the latter three and was edited by Chatham, is worth a try.

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>.