

Pheasant News and Notes

October 2019



Trivia Question

What or who are the “Rasores?”

Farm Bill and USDA News

Management Board member Dave Nomsen (Pheasants Forever, Inc.) provided an update on recent Farm Bill developments as part of our Board meeting in Saint Paul. Dave said he expects FSA to release their interim rule for CRP administration within the next 4-6 weeks. The next general signup is still expected in December and will occur under this interim rule. FSA will likely begin training their staff in earnest on the new rules in late October. Dave also said that some in Washington are already advocating for an expansion of the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (i.e., the cheaper, short-term set-aside program being piloted in the Prairie Pothole region) despite no signup for the program being held yet. The initial SHIPP signup is expected in spring of 2020.

Other tidbits we learned at the AFWA annual conference include:

- NRCS and FSA are cooperatively developing a new system designed to estimate the benefits of conservation actions. The Conservation Application Ranking Tool (CART) will use models to predict the changes (“deltas”) in a resource concern based on the conservation practice(s) employed, which in turn will be used to assign project priorities or scoring points. As part of this process NRCS and FSA are trying to 1) reconcile their respective lists of conservation practices into a common list, and 2) ensure the two agencies are paying the same cost-share rates for each listed practice. Once functional, the CART would be an excellent “client” for a spatially explicit model estimating pheasant densities based on habitat conditions and type.
- FSA is producing a full revision of the 2-CRP Handbook for release this fall, but only small tweaks to EBI calculations are expected.
- To counteract some apparent internal USDA resistance to enrolling more land in CRP SAFE practices, two letters to USDA are being developed (one from Senator Thune and colleagues, the other from the American Wildlife Conservation Partners, a consortium of over 40 traditional “hook-and-bullet” organizations) to express support for SAFE and other wildlife-friendly CRP practices and policies. Senator Hoeven’s annual Appropriations Committee report language also specifically mentions SAFE as a priority practice.
- The next CRP Grasslands (GRP) signup will probably be in the spring of 2020.
- The FSA notice on 2019 NASS soil rental rates and how they will be calculated is out and can be found [here](#).

NRCS just [announced](#) the availability of \$50 million for the VPA-HIP program. NRCS will accept applications from state governments and tribes until November 27th. According to AFWA’s Agriculture Policy Program Coordinator Greg Pilchak, highlights of this VPA-HIP funding round include:

- Up to 25 percent of the funding for each award can be used to provide incentives to improve habitat on enrolled public access program lands.

- Landowner participants must follow NRCS practice standards for any habitat improvement activities. This requirement can be waived if an awardee provides sufficient justification.
- State governments and tribes can request up to 10 percent of program funds for technical assistance.
- To the greatest extent possible, NRCS will set aside \$3 million in funding for public access programs touching Wetlands Reserve Easements.

FSA also recently [announced](#) the availability of a NEPA assessment of changes to the Conservation Reserve Program. The EA was required because of changes called for under the 2018 Farm Bill and is open for comment until October 27th.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

We now have a Management Board-approved set of wild pheasant translocation guidelines, which can be found on our website [here](#). A big thanks to the Technical Committee working group of Chair Tom Keller (Pennsylvania), Casey Cardinal (New Mexico), Robert Perez (Texas), and Jeff Prendergast (Kansas) for doing the heavy lifting on the document for the partnership.

Other pheasant-relevant information learned at the AFWA annual conference:

- The AFWA directors passed a resolution that says in part “AFWA directs its Bird Conservation Committee and Hunting/Shooting Sports Participation Committee to cooperatively assess [the] challenge of declining small game hunting participation, and present a prioritized list of key questions or issues and recommended steps for subsequent actions to this body in a timely manner.” The resolution was sponsored by both of the above-named committees. The requested document should provide an opportunity to lay out a number of needs we have in understanding, mitigating, and adapting to declining pheasant hunter participation, and hopefully attracting more attention and resources to the issue. Your Plan Coordinator is serving on the small group representing the Bird Conservation Committee (via its Resident Game Bird Working Group) to develop the document.
- The Resident Game Bird Working Group is also developing a set of general translocation guidelines for species not covered by an approved translocation document, and recommendations for groups that may design such guidelines in the future. These draw on common points among the translocation guidelines for pheasants, bobwhites, and western quail. The group also wants to create a way to catalog historic information about previous translocation projects as a learning resource.
- The new [Midwest Landscape Initiative](#) is getting cranked up. It is designed to improve upon the USFWS’s original Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) model by creating a more state-led partnership. Most relevant to us is their Habitat Assessment working group (another potential partner for our pheasant modeling need, perhaps) and their development of a process to accelerate multi-state research on CWD (the process might be applicable to us at some point).
- As mentioned in a previous email, the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative has had three key retirements (including their Director) in the last two months. Their Management Board decided to put rehiring those positions on hold while they assess the administrative structure and needs of the organization.
- There was a well-attended reception held to highlight the publication of the *Wildlife Society Bulletin’s* special issue on private lands conservation. A few of the papers most relevant to us are listed below. There will also be a special session on private lands at the 2020 North American conference.

- The USFWS has delayed their listing decision on the monarch until December of 2020.
- The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) was introduced in the House in July and will probably receive its first committee hearing this fall. Sponsors for a companion Senate bill have yet to be identified.
- South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks has hired Responsive Management to perform a public perceptions survey on their nest predator bounty program. They plan on reviewing the results before deciding the program's fate.

Finally, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is [proposing a policy](#) to relax its requirement to perform subacute toxicity tests on birds (waterfowl and upland game birds are the standard test subjects) during the process of registering new pesticides. At first blush this seems like a worrying idea, but after reading the proposal it's a little less alarming. I'm not a toxicologist, though, so if you have access to one at your agency, you might have them take a look and see if there is cause for concern.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[South Dakota contemplates new ways of forecasting pheasant hunting conditions](#)

[South Dakota officials should shoot straight with pheasant report](#)

[Video: Improving game bird habitat helps Montana landowners](#)

[New study: outdoor recreation accounted for 2.2% of the GDP in 2017](#)

[Germany to ban use of Roundup herbicide by end of 2023](#)

Recent Literature

[Wszola, L. S., E. F. Stuber, C. J. Chizinski, J. J. Lusk, and J. J. Fontaine. 2019. Prey availability and accessibility drive hunter movement. *Wildlife Biology*.](#)

[Messinger, L. N., E. F. Stuber, C. J. Chizinski, and J. J. Fontaine. 2019. Mortality, perception, and scale: understanding how predation shapes space use in a wild prey population. *PLoS ONE* 14\(9\):e0222272.](#)

[Morgan, J. J., C. M. Rhoden, B. White, and S. P. Riley. 2019. A state assessment of private lands wildlife conservation in the United States. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 43:328-337.](#)

[McConnell, M. D. 2019. Bridging the gap between conservation delivery and economics with precision agriculture. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 43:391-397.](#)

[Burger, L. W., Jr., K. O. Evans, M. D. McConnell, and L. M. Burger. 2019. Private lands conservation: a vision for the future. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 43:398-407.](#)

[Rosenberg, K. V., A. M. Dokter, P. J. Blancher, J. R. Sauer, A. C. Smith, P. A. Smith, J. C. Stanton, A. Panjabi, L. Helft, M. Parr, and P. P. Marra. 2019. Decline of the North American avifauna. *Science* 10.1126/science.aaw1313.](#)

[Wilsey, C. B., J. Grand, J. Wu, N. Michel, L. Grogan-Brown, and B. Trusty. 2019. North American grasslands and birds report. National Audubon Society, New York, New York, USA.](#)

Trivia Answer

According to avian taxonomists in the mid-1800s, pheasants and other current galliforms belonged in the Order Rasores (Latin for “scrapers” or “scratchers”) along with the doves and pigeons. The taxonomic splitters began to hold sway in the early 1880s, and in 1885 the AOU’s first *Checklist of North American Birds* had separate accounts for the orders Gallinae and Columbae. The Rasores were no more(s).

The currently-named Order Galliformes did not appear in AOU’s checklist until the fourth edition in 1931, and recent DNA analyses show its members are most closely related to ducks and geese (Anseriformes), the two orders forming the Galloanserae clade. If you doubt the cladal relationship between the two orders, check out the [screamers](#), bizarre members of Anseriformes that look and sound like a cross between a goose and a pheasant. Fun fact: if you press the skin of a screamer, it makes a crackling sound. Air sacs in the skin and flesh apparently make them entertaining to squeeze but not fit to eat.

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>.