

Pheasant News and Notes

March 2020



Trivia Question

Every hunter knows that pheasants love to eat waste grain. How long have people leveraged this fact to add pheasants to our collective larder?

Farm Bill and USDA News

The first general CRP signup under the 2018 Farm Bill concluded February 28th. Unfortunately, things got off to a rocky start, with local USDA offices not well equipped to answer questions and facilitate landowner applications for the first six weeks of the signup period. Due to these difficulties, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever sent [a formal request](#) to extend the signup to Secretary Perdue on February 14th. Dave Nomsen, our PF Management Board representative, said he expects USDA to assess the number of applications they received before responding to PF's request. It's unknown how long that might take, but we may (or may not) hear some preliminary numbers from FSA at next week's North American conference.

USDA-FSA [announced](#) they will accept enrollment offers for the Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) beginning March 30th through August 21st. Producers in all counties in Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota are eligible to apply, and offers will be accepted on a non-competitive first come, first served basis. This apparently means that all 50,000 acres available in the pilot can be enrolled in one state if their producers are quick enough to apply. It will be very interesting to see how active this signup is compared to that for the general CRP. If it proves attractive to producers and manageable for USDA to administer, we could see a considerable shift toward this cheaper-per-acre approach in the next Farm Bill.

USDA also recently [announced](#) an initiative to cut U.S. farming's "environmental footprint" in half while increasing production by 40 percent by 2050. These goals are laudable, but just as a reality check for us, the word "wildlife" does not appear in the [brief description](#) of their agenda. Doing good things for soil, water, and climate resources will no doubt spill over into wildlife benefits at some level, but a more direct approach would likely be more productive for us.

In "USDA-adjacent" news, the EPA's Science Advisory Board has found several science-based shortcomings in EPA's proposed waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rule. Their recent [letter](#) to EPA Administrator Wheeler provides details.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

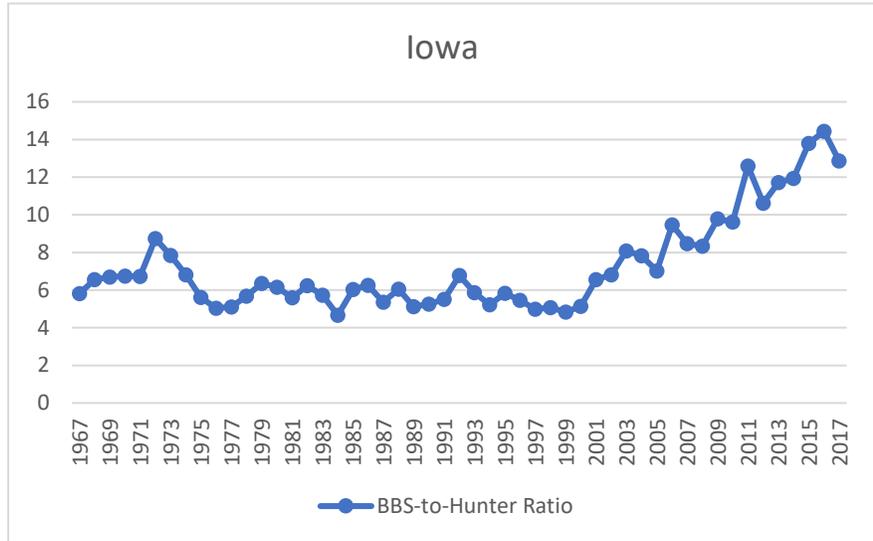
First, a few nice photos from Tom Keller (Technical Committee, Pennsylvania). They recently concluded winter flush counts on their Wild Pheasant Recovery Areas, moving 79 pheasants at six farms totaling 263 acres. Forty-three volunteers and 40 dogs were in on the fun. Thanks for sharing, Tom!



Pheasant Fest drew a record 32,467 attendees this year in Minneapolis – congratulations to all those involved in making the event such a success. If you've never attended a Pheasant Fest, you really should consider fixing that, particularly if you're in the market for anything remotely related to upland hunting. Your next chance will be in [Sioux Falls, South Dakota](#) in February 2021.

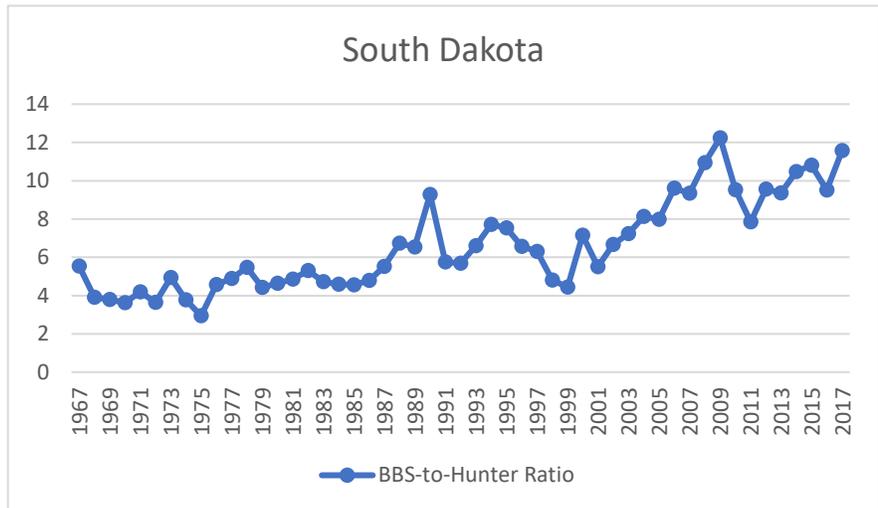
How closely does hunter participation track pheasant abundance at the state level? The answer to that question has implications for a variety of R3 and habitat planning-related issues, including how we go about revising the National Plan's harvest-based habitat model. I used USGS Breeding Bird Survey results and state estimates of pheasant hunters and harvest to look at the relationship between abundance and participation during 1966-2017 by state. If participation perfectly tracked abundance, the ratio of a state's annual BBS index to its annual hunter estimate should have been stable over time. (Before calculating the ratio, I divided hunters by 10,000 to keep values in roughly the same order of magnitude as the BBS index.)

Stability is not what's happening in most states, though. For the 18 states with sufficient hunter data to analyze, 14 have a positive trend in their abundance-to-participation ratio since 1986 (i.e., during the CRP era), meaning their trend in participation is more negative than their trend in population abundance. Iowa provides a good illustration of this at right; participation seems to track abundance fairly well until around 2000,



then abundance begins to overtake participation at an increasing rate. The ratio of abundance to harvest shows the same trend. Like most states, Iowa has a declining long-term trend in its BBS index, but ratios also increased in the Dakotas, the only two states with strongly positive BBS trends. The only state with a consistent negative trend was Pennsylvania, whose increasing reliance on pen-raised birds throws things out of whack.

We'll need to account for this changing relationship when we revamp the National Plan habitat model. This also doesn't bode well for those of us trying argue that more habitat (particularly CRP) will lead to proportionally more hunters, who will in turn generate more hunting-related economic activity. This cause-and-effect chain is still intact to some degree, but it is weaker than it was



30 years ago. As a small silver lining, competition among hunters for the birds present on the landscape may be at a historic low in most states, making gains in hunter satisfaction somewhat easier to achieve (assuming access has been and remains stable, which is probably a stretch in states without substantial walk-in programs).

On a lighter note, one lesser-known drawback of the decline in hunting pressure is the increasing number of pheasants who don't see humans as a threat. Thanks to Jeff Prendergast (Technical Committee, Kansas) for finding another [video](#) of one of these maladapted "friendly" pheasants. In theory, animals that are small, annoying, and delicious shouldn't exist in nature.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[New fee has Michigan pheasant hunters up in arms](#)

[Two state departments plan to more strongly promote South Dakota pheasant hunting this fall](#)

[Pheasant hunting boosts commercial bird demand across North America](#)

[How to sell 30 million pheasants](#)

[Award-winning children's book features pheasants](#)

[Neonicotinoid soybean seed treatments provide negligible benefits to US farmers](#)

[Understanding your food source: chef finds inspiration in the hunt](#)

[California scrambles to increase hunting to help protect public lands](#)

[As hunting numbers decline, wildlife managers seek to diversify the sport](#)

[U.S. winter wheat acreage slightly lower in 2020, continues long-term decline](#)

[Hive heists: why the next threat to bees is organized crime](#)

[The end of British farming?](#)

Recent Literature

[Wilhite, N. G., P. E. Howell, and J. A. Martin. 2020. Evaluation of acoustic recording devices to survey northern bobwhite populations. Wildlife Society Bulletin \(early online version\).](#)

[Fuller, A. K., D. J. Decker, M. V. Schiavone, and A. B. Forstchen. 2020. Ratcheting up rigor in wildlife management decision making. Wildlife Society Bulletin \(early online version\).](#)

[Bonnie, R., E. P. Diamond, and E. Rowe. 2020. Understanding rural attitudes toward the environment and conservation in America. Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, Duke University.](#)

[Mourtzinis, S., et al. 2019. Neonicotinoid seed treatments of soybean provide negligible benefits to US farmers. Scientific Reports 9:11207.](#)

[Barton, L., B. Bingham, K. Sankaranarayanan, C. Monroe, A. Thomas, and B. M. Kemp. 2020. The earliest farmers of northwest China exploited grain-fed pheasants not chickens. Scientific Reports 10:2556.](#)

[Andersen, E. M., and R. J. Steidl. 2020. Power to detect trends in abundance within a distance sampling framework. Journal of Applied Ecology 57:344-353.](#)

Trivia Answer

[Recent evidence](#) suggests Neolithic people in northern China used millet to either feed or attract pheasants, which they subsequently killed and ate, around 8,000 years ago. Bones found at these study sites had earlier been identified as being from chickens, but DNA and isotope signatures showed the birds were in fact ring-necked pheasants whose diet relied heavily on human-associated grain.

Bonus galliform trivia: Which came first, the chicken or the Italian? There appears to be [some evidence](#) that domestic chickens made their way to the New World before Columbus did. Chicken bones found near the Chilean coast appear to date from around 1400 or before, and they show some genetic similarity to chickens found in Polynesia. It's amazing what can happen when you mix boats, human hubris (or desperation), and time.

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>.