

Pheasant News and Notes

April 2021



Trivia Question

You may have heard about Egyptian pharaohs being buried with their pets and other animals. Is there any evidence of people being buried with pheasants?

Farm Bill and USDA News

Jim Inglis (Management Board, Pheasants Forever) passed along a sound clip from Agri-Pulse's Ag and Food Policy Summit, at which USDA Secretary Vilsack had the following to say regarding CRP:

"We are about 4 million acres below where Congress, when it passed the Farm Bill, thought we would be. [CRP] is a tool to be used in the climate discussion, and to the extent that we can create ... additional flexibilities that might make it more attractive for farmers without necessarily always looking at it from a financial standpoint. Senator Thune and others have proposed some interesting flexibilities in the program that we ought to be serious about and consider. There are ways in which we can make sure the ... rental rates that are created don't necessarily result in a significant disruption in the marketplace. We don't want that, but we do want the opportunity for our least efficient land to potentially be used in the most effective way, and CRP is certainly a popular program. It also improves, obviously, habitat, which for those who want to hunt and fish, that's an opportunity for us to improve the recreational side of the economic equation for rural America, and that's something we also have to consider. You know, we certainly are focused on farmers at the Department of Agriculture, but our mission is also rural, and to the extent that we can create more economic opportunity, more job opportunities, that's something we obviously need to take into consideration."

That is good to hear, but it will be interesting to see which "flexibilities" in the program they try first.

At the same Policy Summit, the Farm Bureau reiterated their position that expansion of set-aside programs like CRP should not be used in a climate mitigation context. Their view is that reducing cropland in the U.S. will result in more South American rainforest being converted to cropland, which is antithetical to global carbon sequestration. We'll be looking for their "Save the Rainforest, Plow a Prairie" bumper stickers soon (just kidding, I hope).

On a related note, Tim Griffiths of the USDA-NRCS gave a talk at the North American conference last month that included some information of Great Plains land cover change. Based on his references, acreage exiting CRP is the largest source of grassland loss in the nation. Tim said their Working Lands for Wildlife Program will soon release a conservation plan for the Great Plains Grasslands biome, targeting about 9.8 million acres of grassland conservation work over the next five years. If grassland conservation is a priority, so too should be CRP, regardless of its utility as a climate mitigation tool.

Jim also passed along that traditional conservation groups are trying to help guide the administration's "30 by 30" initiative into a productive direction, but the concept's vagueness is fueling fears among property rights advocates, which should surprise exactly no one. The rhetoric at a recent [public meeting](#)

[in Nebraska](#) is probably typical of what we can expect more of, especially in the western states – notice how “biologists” are being included among the list of villains here.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

We wish a happy retirement to Al Stewart, long-time Technical Committee member from the Michigan DNR. Al was not only a member of the old Midwest Pheasant Study Group (there are still a few of us around), but worked for the DNR for 50 years – quite an accomplishment. We’ll miss Al, but hopefully he will show up at a (fall) Tech Committee meeting down the road sometime.

Justyn Foth (Technical Committee, Delaware) is taking a new job with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and thus will be stepping down from the Technical Committee. Joe Rogerson will be filling in until a permanent replacement is named. We wish Justyn well in his new position.

Zachary Deines, the Iowa State University student working on the multi-state brood survey project, reports that data collection instructions will be distributed to participating states before May 1st. He doesn’t anticipate any significant changes from last year, and said his latest analyses put brood detection probabilities at about 35%. Travis Runia (Technical Committee, South Dakota) has again agreed to administer the Survey123 app for the project – thanks, Travis!

Speaking of which, Travis and his coauthors have a new prairie grouse [modeling paper](#) out in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* – congrats!

New in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* this month is [a paper](#) that seems to advocate for expanding the list of species protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to include resident game birds, reasoning that there are already some non-migratory species (e.g., northern cardinals, several Hawaiian species) given MBTA protections and thus “resident” versus “migratory” distinctions are arbitrary. Inclusion under the Act would then allow the USFWS to coordinate conservation efforts for resident game birds, and federally-led programs could be funded by requiring hunters to purchase a national upland game bird hunting and conservation stamp. I’ll keep my own editorial thoughts about these proposals to myself, but will say that the idea of a national upland bird hunting stamp was proposed to a group of state wildlife agency directors a year or two ago and found little support. I certainly applaud the authors for trying to come up with some new solutions to the historically stubborn problem of resident game bird declines, and if their ideas don’t pan out, maybe others will be inspired to come up with alternatives that will.

Todd Bogenschutz (Technical Committee, Iowa) passed along several items:

- NRCS just [made available](#) their FY2020 program data via their RCA Data Viewer.
- Southwick Associates released some [new data](#) on the 2020 hunting participation increases.
- The Iowa DNR is partnering with WMI to hire a Wildlife Research Specialist; more information is available in the [position announcement](#).

Finally, here are a few items gleaned from my notes from the North American conference last month:

- Pheasants Forever and the National Wildlife Federation are leading an effort to create a National Grasslands Conservation Act, loosely modeled on the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA). Draft statutory language is not yet available, but a few members of Congress have shown preliminary interest in the concept.

- The MAFWA Executive Committee was kicking around the idea of raising its 5% banking fee for administering cooperative projects. No action was taken, but an increase would reduce the funds available for our National Plan partnership should it occur in the future.
- The Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports is co-sponsoring a “How to Talk About Hunting” webinar series this month. If interested, you can register [here](#).
- According to Southwick Associates, industry’s return-on-investment from Pittman-Robertson excise taxes was about 400% in 2016; historically it has been around 900%.
- According to a USDA-FSA representative, the current general CRP signup is “going well” but no preliminary numbers are available. USDA may or may not release an annual tally of CRP acres that were hayed or grazed; apparently they have the numbers but may not summarize them publicly.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Hunting license sales up in 2020](#)

[New study finds birds give people as much happiness as money](#)

[Book review: an open-eyed history of wildlife conservation](#)

[Congress introduces bill to save western monarch butterflies](#)

[Carbon capturing buzz turns into stacked payments for farmers](#)

[Climate not a dirty word in agriculture anymore](#)

[Preliminary analyses show widespread neonicotinoid exposure in Minnesota white-tailed deer](#)

[The diminished purchasing power of farm bill conservation programs holds America back](#)

[Bill Gates tells Reddit why he’s bought so much farmland](#)

[Hunters and anglers celebrate reintroduction of the MAPLand Act](#)

[UK postman plagued by 'Mr. Angry' pheasant](#)

Recent Literature

[Dwight, I. A., P. S. Coates, S. T. Stoute, and M. E. Pitesky. 2021. Health surveillance of a potential bridge host: pathogen exposure risks posed to avian populations augmented with captive-bred pheasants. *Transboundary and Emerging Diseases* \(early online version\).](#)

[Williams, C. K., R. D. Applegate, and P. M. Coppola. 2021. Why are there so many waterfowl and so few northern bobwhites? Rethinking federal coordination. *Journal of Wildlife Management* \(early online version\).](#)

[Runia, T. J., A. J. Solem, N. D. Niemuth, and K. W. Barnes. 2021. Spatially explicit habitat models for prairie grouse: implications for improved population monitoring and targeted conservation. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* \(early online version\).](#)

[Bernal-Garcia, R., F. Gomez-Moreno, F. J. Serrano, C. Heras, and J. Yravedra. 2021. The role of birds in Roman imperial funerary rituals at La Magdalena \(Alcalá de Henares, Spain\): osteoarchaeological and symbolic analysis. *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences* \(online version\).](#)

Trivia Answer

Yes, but not in Egypt. A [recent study](#) found three ancient human tombs that also contained pheasant remains in Madrid, Spain. The tombs were created when Spain was part of the Roman Empire, with the

remains dating from around 200 A.D. The authors concluded that the pheasants were probably votive offerings, with the ritual being either pagan or early Christian in origin. At the time, the birds were a luxury item worth about a week's pay for a common laborer.

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>.