

# Pheasant News and Notes

May 2021



## Trivia Question

What famous author wrote “shooting driven pheasants is worth whatever you pay for it.” Hint: the person figured prominently on PBS last month.

## Farm Bill and USDA News

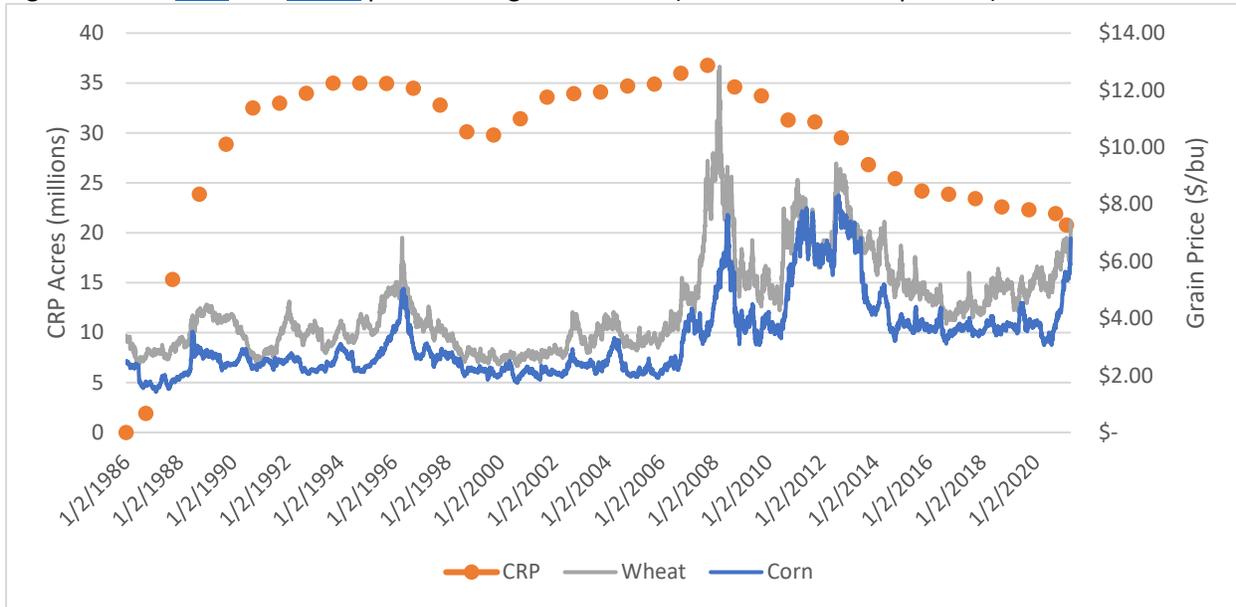
First, the good news. USDA announced sweeping changes to the CRP that should help bolster enrollments. Those changes include:

- Moving all State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) practices to the CRP continuous signup effective immediately;
- Introducing a new Climate-Smart Practice Incentive (3-10% of rental rates) for CRP general and continuous signups that aims to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- Adjusting soil rental rates with soil productivity factors of 0.5 – 1.5, allowing for increases in rental rates on high productivity soils;
- Increasing Practice Incentives Payments (PIPs) from 20% to 50%;
- Introducing one-time, 10 percent “inflationary” adjustments for the life of CRP contracts;
- Increasing payments for water quality practices from 10% to 20% for certain water quality benefiting practices available through the CRP continuous signup, such as grassed waterways, riparian buffers, and filter strips;
- Establishing a CRP Grassland minimum rental rate of \$15, which will increase payments in >1,300 counties;
- Establishing National Grassland Priority Zones to increase enrollment of grasslands in migratory corridors and environmentally sensitive areas;
- Making Highly Erodible Land Initiative (HELI) practices available in both the general and continuous signups;
- Expanding CLEAR30 nationwide;
- Holding a 2021 SHIPP signup in the Prairie Pothole states;
- Implementing a soil sampling protocol to help establish a baseline for soil carbon on land enrolled in CRP by increasing NRCS technical assistance capacity for CRP by \$140 million; and
- Investing \$10 million in the CRP Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation (MAE) program to measure and monitor the soil carbon and climate resilience impacts of conservation practices over the life of new CRP contracts.

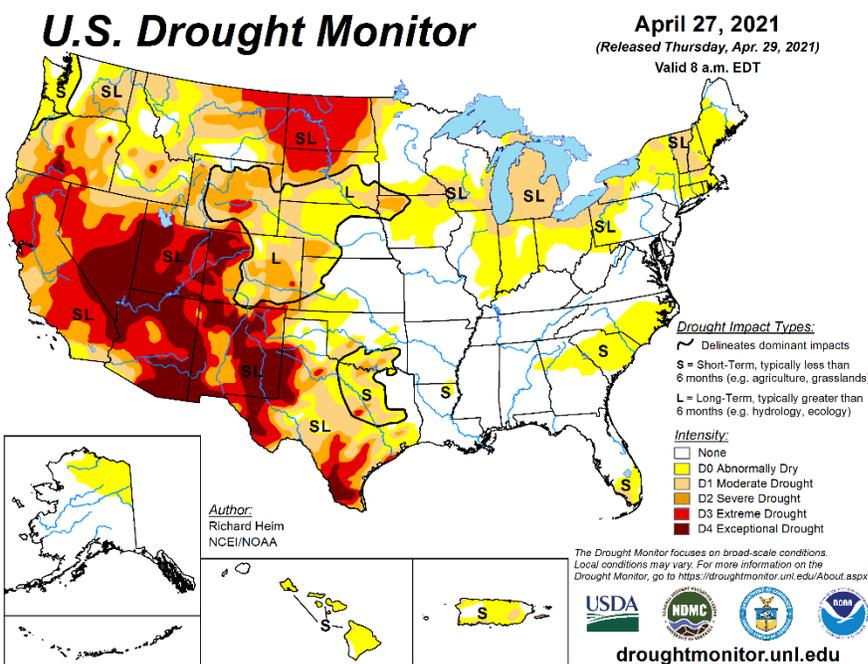
Thanks to Greg Pilchak of AFWA for forwarding the above list. There was some consternation among the AFWA CRP Working Group about the “climate smart” incentives that, as things appear now, actually pay more for introduced grasses (CP1) than for native species (CP2); hopefully this can get ironed out or at least better explained. But other than that, the list includes a bunch of steps in the right direction for pheasant conservation.

Now the bad news. Wheat and especially corn prices are currently skyrocketing, with both over \$6.50 per bushel. The last time we saw prices this high was 2009-2012 when, combined with reduced national acreage caps, CRP enrollments started their long slide downward.

Figure 1. U.S. [corn](#) and [wheat](#) prices during the CRP era (1 Jan 1986 to 26 Apr 2021).



These price spikes are not happening in a vacuum, of course. Drought is entrenched in the western states and parts of the Great Plains, leading to pessimism about the upcoming growing season there. Jim Inglis (Management Board, Pheasants Forever) also pointed out that [fertilizer](#) and [herbicide](#) supplies are tight, leading to higher prices.



Stir all this together and it is unclear how CRP enrollments might respond. Looking ahead, if signups lag and the administration keeps connecting CRP with their climate goals, there may be an appetite among lawmakers to roll back the rental rate cuts contained in the 2018 Farm Bill. Perhaps this could happen without having to find equivalent offsets in the conservation title as we have in the past. Way too soon to tell.

In other news, Senators Stabenow (D-MI) and Thune (R-SD) are co-sponsoring reintroduction of the [Cover Crop Flexibility Act](#), which would remove the prohibition on harvesting or grazing cover crops on prevented plant acres prior to November 1. The bill would allow harvest and grazing outside the primary nesting season nationwide and is supported by a number of farm and conservation groups, including Pheasants Forever. Thanks to Jim Inglis for passing along the news.

Jim and others at PF worked hard this past month on comments solicited on the administration's executive order addressing the climate crisis. You can browse all the submitted comments [here](#).

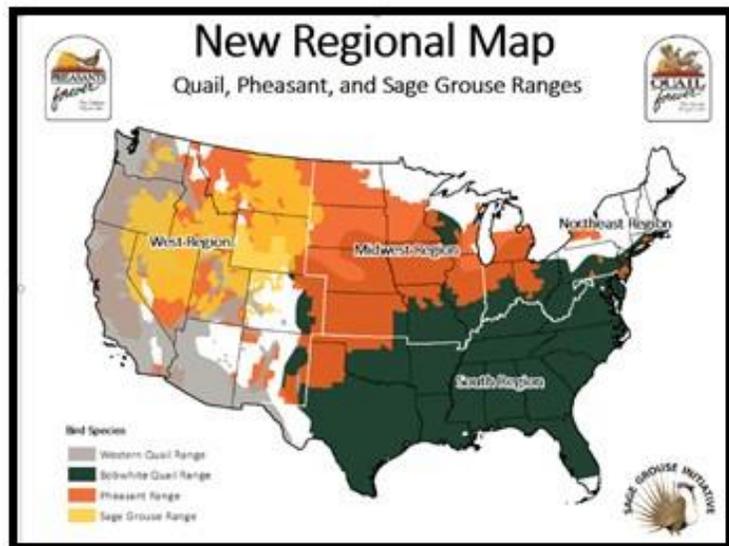
The NRCS rolled out [two comprehensive frameworks](#) for western U.S. grassland conservation within their Working Lands for Wildlife program. The somewhat overlapping frameworks cover the Sagebrush Biome and Great Plains Grasslands, and seek to better coordinate USDA and other resources to conserve grassland species using a more outcome-based approach. The video presentation at the above link emphasizes that the two most important drivers of grassland loss are conversion to cropland and woodland, and that CRP enrollment declines represent the largest single source of lost acres.

### Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

A couple of new state legislative actions of note this month. Michigan [enacted](#) a new \$25 license that is now required of anyone hunting pheasants on public lands in the Lower Peninsula. Proceeds from the permit are used solely to fund pen-raised bird releases on public land. Also, North Dakota will allow certain nonresident landowners to hunt pheasants during their "resident only" early season on public land. Only non-resident landowners who enroll land in their public walk-in program (PLOTS) are eligible to participate.

Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever announced a new staff alignment last month. Most relevant to state agency folks is probably the new regional map and leadership. The new Northeast, South, Midwest, and West regions will be led by Kent Adams, Tim Caughran, Chris McLeland, and Al Eiden, respectively. These new Regional Conservation Directors will report to the Vice President of Conservation Delivery, which is a new position being [advertised](#) through May 14<sup>th</sup> to both internal and external candidates. That position is one of several VPs who will report to new Chief Conservation Officer Ron Leathers.

Ryan Heiniger, the former Director of Agriculture and North Region Field Operations, is no longer with the organization. We thank Ryan for participating in our 2019 North Dakota partnership meeting and wish him well.



The Technical Committee is meeting this week to hopefully finalize the model used to define each state's habitat goals in the revised National Plan. Once that is done and the states have submitted their

results, my goal is to have a new draft for the Tech Committee and Management Board to review well before the end of the month.

Finally, congrats to Travis Runia (Technical Committee, South Dakota) and his coauthors for their [new paper](#) on sage grouse survival.

### **Pheasant-relevant Media**

[How non-native pheasants protect American biodiversity](#)

[Bill signed updating pheasant hunting license fees in Michigan](#)

[Bill expands pheasant hunting to non-ND residents](#)

[Over \\$500,000 dedicated to pheasant habitat conservation in Illinois](#)

[What hunters and anglers need to know about “30 by 30”](#)

[30x30: the hottest number in conservation is rooted more in politics than science](#)

[Mapping the future of Wyoming’s habitat conservation](#)

[At dawn of carbon markets, farmers get up to \\$20 per acre](#)

[One third of the nation’s corn belt has lost its topsoil](#)

[Killer farm robot dispatches weeds with electric bolts](#)

### **Recent Literature**

Pavlacky, D. C., C. A. Hagan, A. M. Bartuszevige, R. Iovanna, T. L. George, and D. E. Naugle. 2021. Private land conservation programs scale-up to meet population recovery goals for the most vulnerable grassland birds. *Conservation Biology*. (Early online version currently embargoed.)

[Parsons, L. A., T. J. Runia, G. P. Vincent, A. J. Gregory, and J. A. Jenks. 2021. Greater Sage-Grouse survival varies with breeding season events in West Nile virus non-outbreak years. \*Ornithological Applications\* \(early online version\).](#)

[Behney, A. C. 2021. High-intensity short-duration grazing during spring is not an effective habitat management tool for Northern Bobwhites in Colorado. \*Ornithological Applications\* \(early online version\).](#)

[Howell, P. E., N. B. Wilhite, R. Gardner, J. L. Mohlman, R. B. Chandler, I. B. Parnell, and J. A. Martin. 2021. The effects of landscape characteristics on northern bobwhite density. \*Journal of Wildlife Management\* \(early online version\).](#)

[Duda, M. D., T. Beppler, D. J. Austen, and J. F. Organ. 2021. The precarious position of wildlife conservation funding in the United States. \*Human Dimensions of Wildlife\* \(early online version\).](#)

[Straw, E. A., E. N. Carpentier, and M. J. F. Brown. 2021. Roundup causes high levels of mortality following contact exposure in bumble bees. \*Journal of Applied Ecology\* \(early online version\).](#)

### **Trivia Answer**

Ernest Hemingway. The following is from “Remembering Shooting-Flying: A Key West Letter,” published in *Esquire*, February 1935:

*There is a heavy norther blowing; the gulf is too rough to fish and there is no shooting now. When you are through work it is nearly dark and you can ride out on the boulevard by the sea and throw clay targets with a hand trap against this gale and they will dip and jump and rise into strange angles like a jacksnipe in the wind. Or you can throw them out with the gale behind them and they will go like a teal over the water. Or you can get down below the sea wall and have someone throw them out high over your head riding the wind, but if you puff one into black dust you cannot pretend it was an old cock pheasant unless you are a better pretender than I am. The trouble is there isn't any thud, nor is there the line of bare trees, nor are you standing on a wet, leaf-strewn road, nor do you hear the beaters, nor the racket when a cock gets up and, as he tops the trees, you are on him, then ahead of him, and at the shot he turns over and there is that thump when he lands. Shooting driven pheasants is worth whatever you pay for it. But when you cannot shoot you can remember shooting and I would rather stay home, now, this afternoon and write about it than go out and sail clay saucers in the wind, trying to break them and wishing they were what they're not.*

*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>.*