

Pheasant News and Notes

April 2022



Trivia Question

When and where will the 2023 Pheasant Fest be held?

Farm Bill and USDA News

Not much good news on the CRP front these days. Landowner interest in new enrollments has always been negatively correlated with grain prices, and those are going through the roof right now (although so are input costs). Jim Inglis (Management Board, Pheasants Forever) reports that USDA is unlikely to release application figures from its recently completed general signup for another few months, but if history is any guide they probably won't be pretty. To make matters worse, about four million acres (almost 20% of all current CRP enrollments) are set to expire this year.

Meanwhile, low grain supplies spurred several farm groups to [call for USDA to allow production](#) on some current CRP acres penalty-free. [USDA has resisted this request](#) so far; hopefully this will not become an ongoing issue.

To help mitigate these losses, PF and other conservation groups garnered bipartisan support for [some potential CRP reforms](#) that could help increase overall demand and keep SAFE practices in the continuous category where they belong. Thanks to Jim and the rest of the governmental affairs team for their work on this.

The potential downside of the above legislation is that it tends to perpetuate the redefinition of CRP as a "working lands" program. We know from multiple studies that "traditional" CRP (general and continuous contracts that are undisturbed except for a prescribed mid-contract management treatment) produces 3-4 times more pheasants per acre than the average "working" grassland (annually grazed or hayed tracts), so this transition does not exactly work in our favor. However, if we are going to argue for a higher national CRP acreage cap in the 2023 Farm Bill (the National Plan figure is 45 million acres, and AFWA's is 40 million), our case is cut off at the knees if demand is sputtering before we even hit 30 million. In past Farm Bills, national caps have normally gone down, not up, when the CRP "market" appeared soft. In this context, bolstering demand by allowing producers to monetize some of their CRP forage could ultimately be beneficial. I won't pretend to know where the right balance is policy-wise, other than to guess we'll probably be in this Catch-22 until grain prices return to "normal." Yet another reason to wish for a quick end to the war.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

You have probably seen by now that Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever CEO Howard Vincent announced his retirement effective February 2023. Howard has served as PF's leader since 2000, guiding the "bird club's" remarkable growth in the intervening years. He made sure partnerships were a cornerstone of that growth, and we at the National Plan partnership have been but one beneficiary of that business model. We thank Howard for all his past support and wish him a great final year as CEO.

Part of Howard's legacy is the growth of Pheasant Fest, which drew almost 22,000 attendees in Omaha last month. It takes a huge effort to pull this off every year, and another big thank you to everyone who helped make it such a draw.

We held our semi-annual National Plan Management Board meeting last week. State representatives from Nebraska, Illinois, Michigan, South Dakota, Ohio, Texas, Washington, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Kansas, Missouri, California, and Idaho attended, along with Jim Inglis for PF. Jim gave us an excellent overview of current issues on Capitol Hill and we briefly reviewed the partnership's finances, which are in good shape for the next three years. The remainder of the meeting was spent reviewing some draft web applications I developed to turn the National Plan into a more user-friendly resource, especially for those who are trying to use it answer policy and budget allocation questions. We decided that at least some of the tools should not be publicly available given it takes a level of technical knowledge to choose and interpret the inputs and outputs correctly. I will continue working with the Technical Committee to refine and improve these apps in the coming months.

The North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference was also last month. My pheasant-relevant notes from the various committee and working group meetings included:

Resident Game Bird Working Group

- We are still trying to gather state data sets (harvest and hunter estimates, population indices, etc.) relevant to answering R3 questions for this species group. I volunteered to help organize these data and make them web accessible.
- Al Eiden (PF/QF) started a good conversation about how difficult it has become to attract applicants for open positions. This view was shared by many, and that line of discussion was picked up during several other related meetings.
- Kelley Myers (USFWS) gave an update on the [Midwest Landscape Initiative](#) and their efforts to define focal species and habitats for collaborative work across the MAFWA region. The MLI was conceived as a more state-centric approach to multi-state conservation than the USFWS-led Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) launched almost a decade ago. (As an aside, thanks to our Management Board chair Russ Mason, I will be presenting our National Plan work to the MLI Technical Committee next month; hopefully we can start integrating our work with theirs.)

CRP Working Group

- Beverly Preston (USDA-FSA) said as of January 22nd there were about 25,000 acres worth of continuous signup offers. Grasslands signup is April 4th through May 13th. For Grasslands, they are considering changes to priority areas, with decisions on acceptance by early summer. They are also looking at potential changes to 25% county cap waiver rule.
- In February, FSA met with Todd Bogenschutz (Technical Committee, Iowa; who also serves as the CRP Working Group chair) and other stakeholders to consider changes to the Wildlife Habitat Planting practice (CP 420) so that early successional habitats were easier to create and maintain. Decisions on the request will be included in an upcoming public notice.
- USDA is funding a study to better quantify CRP's role in sequestering soil carbon. Details can be found [here](#).

Agricultural Conservation Committee

- AFWA's draft 2023 Farm Bill policy recommendations include:
 - Establish a 40-million-acre national CRP acreage cap
 - Cap Grassland CRP enrollment at 10% of the total program acreage
 - Exempt CRP lands that are "working" acres, including Grasslands, from the 25% county cap, including general and continuous acres subjected to non-emergency haying and grazing
 - Restrict emergency haying and grazing on the same acres to no more than once every two years, and non-emergency haying to no more than once every three years
 - Restore limits on emergency and non-emergency haying to certain practices on not more than 50 percent and 75 percent of contract acres, respectively

Private Lands Working Group

- Bill White said Missouri recently launched the Missouri Biodiversity Credit Trading Pilot Program designed to deliver soil, water, and wildlife benefits. It focuses on establishing buffer strips along crop field borders, paying landowners \$25-\$50 per acre. MDC will sponsor the pilot at \$100K/year, and QF staff will help with monitoring outcomes. Partners include farm commodity groups and the Ecosystem Services Marketing Consortium, which has dozens of funders/partners to potentially sell credits to, which will hopefully fund the project in the future.

Grassland Working Group

- PF/QF and other partners are still lining up congressional support for the North American Grasslands Conservation Act, which calls for \$350 million in annual federal funding for a variety of management activities. More details can be found [here](#).
- The [Central Grasslands Roadmap](#) and [Mississippi Flyway Grasslands Roadmap](#) efforts are coordinating regional partners on grassland conservation planning. The CGR is sponsoring a four-part webinar called "Grasslands: Culture, Conservation, and Resiliency" starting this month; more information is available [here](#).
- Greg Link reported that the North Dakota Meadowlark Initiative is up and running; a stakeholder survey showed 84% agreed that a grassland initiative was important to the state. They are pursuing a RCPP proposal to convert 20,000 acres of marginal cropland back to grass, and to improve another 50,000 acres of current grassland.
- Ted Koch with the North American Grouse Partnership said the latest listing decision on lesser prairie-chickens is due June 1st, and his group is promoting the idea of "strategic, focused and sufficient effort to support landowners in conserving lesser prairie-chicken habitat."

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Pheasants Fest and Quail Classic balances sport with conservation](#)

[Texas: Highly pathogenic avian influenza \(HPAI\) reported in Erath County commercial pheasant flock](#)

[Thousands of pheasants, ducks At Sag Harbor farm euthanized over bird flu fears](#)

[Pennsylvania Game Commission growing its pheasant program as interest rebounds](#)

[Hunter Nation: Gov. Evers vetoes commonsense hunting and fishing bills that would have expanded hunting access](#)

[Wisconsin state pheasant farm to convert 20 acres of grassland to help with straw production](#)

[Colorado hunting and angling outreach programs help to get people in the outdoors](#)

[Game meats — why we're going wild for venison, quail, pheasant, bison and more](#)

[Mapping the Farm Bill: Reviewing the CRP, law, and land history](#)
[U.S. farm groups urge sowing on protected land as war cuts off Ukraine supply](#)
[Vilsack: Conservation land not the answer to global food crisis](#)
[Report: Agriculture runoff is leading cause of water pollution in the U.S.](#)
[Pipeline debate: CO2 projects may benefit ethanol, but worry landowners](#)

Recent Literature

[Apa, A. D., et al. 2022. Survival rates of translocated Gunnison sage-grouse. Wildlife Society Bulletin \(early online version\).](#)

[Randall, K. J., et al. 2022. Managing forbs preferred by greater sage-grouse and soil moisture in mesic meadows with short-duration grazing. Rangeland Ecology and Management \(early online version\).](#)

[Ritzell, A. D., et al. 2022. Quail and rain in semiarid rangelands: does management matter? Journal of Wildlife Management \(early online version\).](#)

[Vaske, J. J., et al. 2022. Evaluating alternative survey methodologies in human dimensions of wildlife research. Human Dimensions of Wildlife \(early online version\).](#)

[Meng, N., M. D. McConnell, and L. W. Burger, Jr. 2022. Economically targeting conservation practices to optimize conservation and net revenue using precision agriculture tools. Precision Agriculture \(early online version\).](#)

[Robinson, S. V. J., L. H. Nguyen, and P. Galpern. 2022. Livin' on the edge: Precision yield data shows evidence of ecosystem services from field boundaries. Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment \(early online version\).](#)

[Eccard, J. A. 2022. Can rolling composite wildflower blocks increase biodiversity in agricultural landscapes better than wildflower strips? Journal of Applied Ecology \(early online version\).](#)

[Mushet, D., M. P. van der Burg, and M. J. Anteau. 2022. Assessing conservation and management actions with ecosystem services better communicates conservation value to the public. Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management \(early online version\).](#)

[Spangler, K., et al. 2022. Path dependencies in US agriculture: Regional factors of diversification. Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment \(early online version\).](#)

Trivia Answer:

February 17-19 in Minneapolis.

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>.