

Pheasant News and Notes

August 2022



Trivia Question

How many states release adult pheasants for put-and-take hunting purposes?

USDA and Legislative News

USDA [announced](#) the results of its most recent Grasslands CRP signup last month. Of the 4.3 million acres offered for enrollment by landowners, 3.1 million were accepted for a national acceptance rate of 72%. [States with the most acres accepted](#) included Colorado (642,134), South Dakota (424,984), Nebraska (421,911), New Mexico (378,286), Kansas (269,211), and Texas (246,527), which collectively accounted for 77% of the national total.

In the news release, USDA says about 3.9 million acres of general and continuous signup contracts are expiring this year and about 2.5 million acres of new contracts have been accepted, for a net loss of about 1.4 million acres in these categories. As of [May 2022](#), Grasslands CRP made up about 18% of the total CRP acres; if the continuous signup acres do not change much through the end of the fiscal year, this should increase to about 33% in October.

As a reminder about why this is important, conventionally hayed or grazed grasslands (which Grasslands enrollments may resemble) produce about 75% fewer successful pheasant nests per acre than general and continuous CRP. Those who asked for CRP to be transformed into a “working lands” program are getting their wish, and we can expect fewer pheasants to be produced as a result.

Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon [introduced](#) the North American Grasslands Conservation Act on July 27th, along with co-sponsors Senators Klobuchar of Minnesota and Michael Bennet of Colorado. Modeled after the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), the centerpiece of the bill is a \$290 million competitive grant program for grassland conservation projects during 2022 through 2026. Congratulations to Bethany Erb and the rest of the Pheasants Forever governmental affairs team for getting the bill past this important milestone.

Speaking of NAWCA, U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland recently [appointed](#) Ron Leathers (PF/QF Chief Conservation Officer) to serve on the NAWCA Council, which reviews and recommends applications for project funding. Congrats to Ron on his well-deserved appointment!

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

August is roadside brood survey time for a number of states – good luck to all the Tech Committee members and others who are working hard to get these data collected, analyzed, and turned into information the public can use.

Our best wishes to Travis Runia (Technical Committee, South Dakota), who took a position with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the end of July. Travis was among the dwindling group of Tech Committee

members who worked on both the first and second editions of the National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan, and we thank him for all he's done for the pheasant management community throughout his (still youthful) career. We also welcome long-time SDGF&P game bird specialist Alex Solem as he fills in for Travis; the Department has posted the open position [here](#).

The winter pheasant ecology paper co-authored by Travis that we mentioned here a few months ago has now been [published](#) its final cite-able form. Congrats again for getting it over the finish line.

The Technical Committee has set the dates for its upcoming fall meeting in Pocatello, Idaho – October 5th – 7th. We are meeting back-to-back with the Western Quail Working Group, with whom we will share an optional field trip on the 5th. Jeff Knetter is working on logistical details based on planned attendance, so we remind Technical Committee members to indicate your intentions on the survey Jeff sent out this week. Please send ideas for agenda topics to me and copy Jeff; he will be out of the office for a good part of this month.

I helped plan and host the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Private Lands Staff Forum in Kansas City, Missouri last month. The forum was designed for field-level private lands biologists who regularly interact with landowners, and about one-third of the 150 or so attendees were PF/QF staff in various partnership positions from 14 states. NABCI's intent has been to host similar meetings around the four AFWA regions on a rotating basis, so this first one was something of a (hopefully successful) experiment. Materials presented at the meeting will be posted online soon. Thanks to all the agencies and organizations who helped plan and send attendees to the meeting.

The Minnesota DNR recently hosted a webinar entitled "Evaluation of grassland wildlife exposure to soybean aphid insecticides on public lands," which is now available [here](#). Thanks to Nicole Davros for both presenting and making the recording available.

In grassland bird news, there are now officially three species of meadowlarks instead of two. The Chihuahuan meadowlark (*Sturnella lilianae*) [was recently split off](#) from the eastern meadowlark based on genomic data and differences in vocalizations. In the U.S., it breeds from northern Arizona, northern New Mexico, and western Texas (possibly also in southeastern Colorado) south into Mexico.

Finally, [new research](#) suggests promoting forest protection and expansion as an effective way to offset carbon emissions may be misguided. Climate change-related wildfire and disease are liberating the carbon stored in forests at rates much faster than expected, making carbon credits associated with those stores worth correspondingly less. Storing carbon underground beneath a canopy of native grassland is looking better all the time.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Montana's controversial pheasant stocking program moves forward](#)

[Spring surveys show mixed results for ruffed grouse, pheasant and waterfowl in Wisconsin](#)

[North Dakota's spring pheasant count declines, but summer brood conditions could improve fall prospects](#)

[Minnesota Governor's Pheasant Opener will happen in tradition-rich Worthington in October](#)

[Iowa pheasant population survey now underway](#)

[South Dakota GF&P predicts excellent pheasant season, overall license sales still strong](#)

[Game over for UK shooting season as bird flu and Brexit take a heavy toll](#)

[North Dakota retired upland game biologist continues to return to the field after nearly 60 years](#)
[Conservation Reserve Program benefits can outweigh high commodity prices](#)
[How to turn unproductive field areas into pollinator havens](#)
[Quail to the rescue: Eating 'out of control' tick population in New York](#)
[Fowl play - watch mad moment berserk pheasant ruins horse's run in big race by flying straight into him](#)
[The bizarre bird that's breaking the tree of life](#)
[Do animals dream?](#)

Recent Literature

- [Kauth, H. R., A. J. Gregory, A. J. Kauth, S. Harsh, T. J. Runia, and R. C. Lonsinger. 2022. Snow and land use alter pheasant survival in South Dakota. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 86:e22243.](#)
- [Balfour, M. J. 2022. The ring-necked pheasant \(*Phasianus colchicus*\) industry within the United Kingdom and the threat posed by *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*: a review. *Veterinary Science* 9:391.](#)
- [Augustine, J. K., and D. Burchfield. 2022. Evaluation of unmanned aerial vehicles for surveys of lek-mating grouse. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* \(early online version\).](#)
- [Drovetski, S. V., B. K. Schmidt, J. E. Lai, M. S. Gross, M. L. Hladik, K. O. Matterson, and N. K. Karouna-Renier. 2022. Exposure to crop production alters cecal prokaryotic microbiota, inflates virulome and resistome in wild prairie grouse. *Environmental Pollution* 306:119418.](#)
- [Lundblad, C. G., C. A. Hagen, J. P. Donnelly, S. T. Vold, A. M. Moser, and S. P. Espinoza. 2022. Sensitivity to weather drives Great Basin mesic resources and Greater Sage-Grouse productivity. *Ecological Indicators* 142:109231.](#)
- [Beers, A. T., and S. N. Frey. 2022. Greater sage-grouse habitat selection varies across the marginal habitat of its lagging range margin. *Ecosphere* 13:e4146.](#)
- [O'Donnell, M. S., D. R. Edmunds, C. L. Aldridge, J. A. Heinrichs, A. P. Monroe, P. S. Coates, B. G. Prochazka, S. E. Hanser, and L. A. Wiechman. 2022. Defining fine-scaled population structure among continuously distributed populations. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* \(early online version\).](#)
- [Li, C., J. M. Moore, V. Acosta-Martinez, L. M. Fultz, and M. Kakarla. 2022. Conversion of Conservation Reserve Program land back to cropland: Changes in soil carbon and nitrogen dynamics during the first five years. *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* 77:333-346.](#)

Trivia Answer:

By my unofficial count, 22 states agencies have released adult pheasants in the past couple of years, including Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Illinois, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, Washington, Oregon, California, and Hawaii. Montana is set to become the 23rd this fall. If you know of a state that should or shouldn't be on the list, please let me know.

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>.