

Pheasant News and Notes

June 2022



Trivia Question

In what year did Pheasants Forever hire its first Farm Bill Biologist?

Farm Bill and USDA News

USDA relented a bit to several farm groups' request for some CRP to be released for return to crop production. It [announced](#) that land under CRP contracts that expire this year may be returned to crop production after the primary nest season ends but before the official end of the contract (September 30th). As we noted last month, about 4 million acres are set to expire this year and would be eligible for the early out. By design (I assume), the announcement won't affect row crop producers but allows those wanting to plant winter wheat and other fall-sown crops to do so under a normal production schedule. The main downside for us is the loss of fall cover and associated hunting opportunities on those acres, but some landowners may have been planning to disk their fields in October in preparation for the 2023 planting season anyway. Regardless, the ruling means that in wheat country, there will be somewhat less cover this fall and winter than there would have been otherwise.

USDA also issued a [notice](#) regarding haying and grazing CRP under some specific emergency drought conditions. These activities are only allowed outside of a state's primary nesting season, and haying may only occur on 50% of a contract's acres. FSA added to the list of CRP practices eligible for harvest, which now includes grass waterways (CP8), filter strips (CP21), wetland restorations (CP23 and CP23A), farmable wetland buffers (CP28), duck nesting habitat (CP37), and constructed wetlands (CP39), although haying remains prohibited within 120 feet of a stream or permanent waterbody, and outside the buffer portion of wetland practices.

In non-USDA federal news, the Wildlife Society is joining some other conservation partners in organizing a congressional call-in drive on June 7th in support of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA). More details are [here](#).

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

On our monthly Technical Committee call this week, Jeff Knetter said the group's fall meeting will be the first week in October in Pocatello, Idaho. Jeff is still working on specific dates, but our meeting will immediately follow the Western Quail Working Group meeting at the same location.

The group also talked briefly about the impacts of avian influenza. No state reported any issues with their wild pheasant populations but as we heard last month, Wyoming had to depopulate one of their state-run production facilities and commercial flocks in Texas and elsewhere were forced to do the same. Between AI and skyrocketing feed and transportation costs, at least one state has had trouble finding vendors to bid on pheasant deliveries for this fall.

Pheasants Forever held its biannual all-team meeting last month in Welch, Minnesota. A few of my notes from that event included:

- PF/QF now has about 450 employees, making it the second largest employer of wildlife biologists in the country (the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is number one).
- I didn't get the exact number, but somewhere around 200 of the staff members were hired into their current positions within the last two years.
- About 350 chapter events were cancelled during the pandemic, but 2022 chapter fundraising is up 87% from pre-pandemic levels.
- The organizations spent over \$72.5 million on habitat projects in 2021, impacting about 2.1 million acres.

We also learned there are about 35 million acres of energy and transportation rights-of-way in the U.S., some of which offer potential as upland habitat. Relatedly, PF recently [announced](#) a partnership with the American Petroleum Institute to start delivering on that potential. The agreement calls for several cooperative pilot projects under PF's [Rights-of-Way & Energy Habitat Program](#).

I gave a presentation about our partnership and the National Pheasant Plan to the [Midwest Landscape Initiative's](#) Technical Committee last month, and afterward attended one of their Habitat Assessment subcommittee meetings. They are asking some of the same questions we are (e.g., where on the landscape do we get the highest return on investment for conservation projects?) but have hundreds of species to deal with. They recently whittled down their list to 340 "[Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#)," or RSGCNs. Pheasants did not make the cut but bobwhites, greater prairie-chickens, and sharp-tailed grouse did. Regardless, they were interested in perhaps incorporating the models and tools we are developing into their's once they get to that stage, and I will continue communicating with them as our work progresses.

Speaking of which, I recently used some GIS-derived habitat data to create a predictive model of pheasant abundance using a small subset of North Dakota's crowing count data set, the outputs of which I shared on the Technical Committee call this week. The model itself is more interesting as a proof-of-concept than as an end product; there are several more steps needed to create outputs suitable for spatial toolmaking.

There was another batch of National Wild Turkey Symposium papers published in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* this month. They were too numerous to list in the Recent Literature section below, but the new bunch includes one coauthored by Technical Committee member Michael Schiavone of New York. Congrats!

Pheasant-relevant Media

[ND pheasant crowing counts underway](#)

[Pheasant chicks hatching at Montana State Prison as state grapples with avian flu protections](#)

[The Wyoming Game and Fish Department recently euthanized pheasants at a bird farm near Sheridan](#)

[Senator Thune: CRP should be more of a working lands program](#)

[Addressing ethics in upland hunting \(featuring our own Sarah Garrison\)](#)

[Habitat University podcast: solutions to the private lands challenge \(featuring Colorado's Ray Aberle\)](#)

[Plucky pheasant tries to take a bus ride to St. Helier](#)

Recent Literature

[Lawrence, A. J., M. A. Boggie, W. R. Gould, S. A. Carleton, and C. T. Nichols. 2022. Differential seasonal avoidance of anthropogenic features and woody vegetation by Lesser Prairie-Chickens. Ornithological Applications \(early online version\).](#)

[Gelling, E. L., A. C. Pratt, and J. L. Beck. 2022. Linking microhabitat selection, range size, reproductive state, and behavioral state in greater sage-grouse. Wildlife Society Bulletin \(early online version\).](#)

[Kunkel, M. R., D. G. Mead, M. G. Ruder, and N. M. Nemeth. 2022. Our current understanding of West Nile Virus in upland game birds. Wildlife Society Bulletin \(early online version\).](#)

[Danks, Z. D., M. V. Schiavone, A. B. Butler, K. Fricke, A. Davis, and D. T. Cobb. 2022. Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on 2020 spring turkey hunting across the United States. Wildlife Society Bulletin \(early online version\).](#)

Trivia Answer:

2003. (That was the year mentioned at the PF all-team meeting, anyway.)

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>.