

Pheasant News and Notes

December 2022



Trivia Question

Winter wheat is an important pheasant nesting habitat where it remains abundant. In what year did U.S. winter wheat acreage peak?

USDA and Legislative News

Conversations about the 2023 Farm Bill continue to ramp up among stakeholders. AFWA's CRP Working Group, led by our own Todd Bogenschutz (Technical Committee, Iowa), met last month and discussed three main topics:

- CRP rental rate adjustments – South Dakota Senator John Thune has floated the idea of changing the way soil rental rates are calculated such that less productive land is offered a more attractive rate. State farm bill coordinators within the group were asked to assess how much difference this change might make in rates paid. Most states calculated that rates would be similar to slightly higher than those currently paid, except lower rates were expected for grassed waterways and other buffer practices. Given these results, it seemed the group would probably support (or at least not oppose) such a change if it was brought forward.
- Grasslands CRP cap – USDA accepted over 3 million acres of Grasslands offers in the 2022 signup, and by my count we should see around 7 million acres enrolled in total once these new offers are processed. Many worry this level of enrollment will soon overwhelm general and continuous signup practice acres under the 27-million-acre national program cap. The initial view is that the national cap is unlikely to change in the next Farm Bill, so a specific limit on Grasslands acres (either by acreage or a percentage of the total CRP enrollment by state) is needed to keep “traditional” CRP practices and habitats from getting completely squeezed out. It remains uncertain what kind and size of cap might be most beneficial for us at this point.
- Novel applications of CRP – Ray Aberle of Colorado alerted the group to [a new CREP](#) that pays landowners to permanently forego their use of irrigation water in addition to establishing a conservation cover. The group was concerned that the original intent of CRP (i.e., establishing conservation cover on current crop ground) is getting lost in the shuffle of trying to address too many issues with CRP payments (like retiring irrigation wells in this case, or protecting existing grasslands in the case of Grasslands CRP). These ancillary issues, while important, should probably be addressed through other programs like EQIP or CSP so as not to impact CRP's limited acres and funding.

The American Bird Conservancy rolled out their Farm Bill recommendations last month, which they have dubbed the “Bird Saver Platform.” Our friend Steve Riley, who is now ABC's Director of Farm Bill Policy, led a discussion among stakeholders on their desired positions. Among their recommendations:

- Increase the national CRP acreage cap to 70 million acres (a bump similar in magnitude to that provided to other USDA programs through the Inflation Reduction Act) and require FSA to adjust rental rates annually.
- Establish a “Rest-Recover-Recapture” approach to programs for existing grasslands, with appropriate incentives offered for the “rest” component being key. This could be accomplished

either through a new FSA program (around \$50 million and 5 million acres) or through existing NRCS programs with the necessary funding and prioritization.

- Mandate that RCPP use a simple RFP process similar to VPA-HIP to distribute program funding and increase the administrative cap on partner technical assistance from 25 to 30%.
- Establish a program that delivers the goals of the proposed North American Grasslands Conservation Act, expand Sodsaver provisions nationwide, and strengthen disincentives for native sod-breaking. (There was some discussion among the participants about potential disadvantages of having the Grassland Act administered by USDA rather than the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as the proposed Act language currently specifies.)
- Change crop insurance provisions that encourage the preemptive use of pesticides, and disincentivize cropping on marginal land by reducing crop insurance premium subsidies in proportion to the land's productivity.

Regarding the current Farm Bill and its programs, last month USDA-FSA held a briefing for conservation stakeholders about their plans for CRP administration in 2023. Highlights included:

- FSA remains committed to hitting the national CRP acreage cap and other statutory provisions of the program.
- Climate change and carbon sequestration will continue to be emphasized as program goals.
- Signup dates are still undetermined, but earlier signups are desired.
- Reforms of Grasslands signup criteria are being considered, but Grasslands enrollments will still be emphasized.
- Updated rental rates are still being prepared, but it appears certain that rates for Grasslands enrollments will be set at 75% of published NASS grassland rental rates.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

John Laux (Technical Committee, Nebraska) is leaving the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to become the Permanent Habitat Protection Program Manager for Pheasant Forever and Quail Forever, which is a brand-new position. We sincerely thank John for his service on the Tech Committee and are glad he is staying in the upland game world!

This means NGPC has a vacancy in its Upland Game Program Manager position; that [job announcement](#) is open through December 7th. Please pass the link along to anyone who might be interested.

Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever recently announced a restructuring that bolsters their “vice president” level of leadership. The following staff have been classified accordingly:

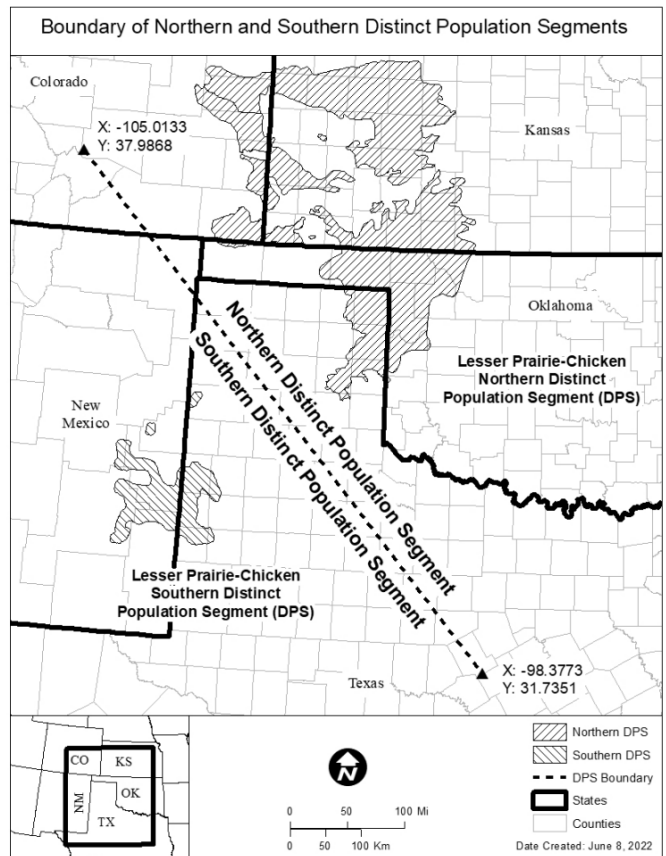
- Drew Larson, Vice President of Conservation Delivery
- Rich Wissink, Vice President of Conservation Programs
- Sarah Mills, Vice President of Human Resources
- Tom Fuller, Vice President of Chapter and Volunteer Services
- Matt Holland, Vice President of Grant Development
- Jordan Martincich, Vice President of Development
- Chris Kalis, Vice President of Corporate Partnerships
- Andrew Vavra, Vice President of Marketing

Congratulations to everyone on the list, especially Drew, who takes on a new position as part of the move.

Taylor Shirley, former Master's student at Iowa State University, has [published](#) the primary work from her thesis in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin*. You'll recall that Taylor studied pheasant use of fall-seeded cover crops in eastern Iowa and found cover crops had limited utility for nesting pheasants. Congratulations to Taylor and her advisor/coauthor Adam Janke on the publication.

I had hoped to report this year's changes in pheasant nesting habitat acreage here this month, but USDA has released neither the FY2023 CRP acres under contract nor the 2022 county-level data for small grains and hay acres harvested (though the state and national totals are available). I'm also still waiting on USGS to publish their analyses of the 2021 North American Breeding Bird Survey. As soon as those data are published, I'll update the [Plan dashboard](#) with the latest totals.

The big news in the upland game bird world last month was [the decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) to list the lesser prairie-chicken under the Endangered Species Act. The listing defines two distinct population segments, one in the north where the species is designated as threatened, and one in the south where the birds are endangered. I haven't talked to anyone working in this area in quite a while, but new listings almost always change the dynamic of working with landowners in the areas affected, which in turn could impact the ability to manage pheasant habitat there. It will be interesting to see what effect the listing has on interest in CRP signups in the region – one might expect both lower landowner demand and higher incentives and regulatory predictability offered in response. Lessers have been the focus of conservation here for many years, so time will tell if the listing actually provides any additional benefits for the species. More rain certainly would.



Pheasant-relevant Media

[Drought, other factors reduce Texas pheasant numbers](#)

[Drought in Kansas creating unlikely locations to hunt pheasant, quail](#)

[Fewer SD pheasant licenses have been sold this season](#)

[Pheasant hunter says AED saved his life near Gregory](#)

[Pheasants calling: One Box's one bird and family](#)

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists the lesser prairie-chicken under the Endangered Species Act](#)

[Average cropland values near record highs](#)

[Cover crops can lower yields, according to new study](#)

Recent Literature

[Shirley, T. R., and A. K. Janke. 2022. Ring-necked pheasant nest site selection in a landscape with high adoption of fall-seeded cover crops. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* \(early online version\).](#)

[Hennig, J. D., J. D. Scasta, A. C. Pratt, C. P. Wanner, and J. L. Beck. 2022. Habitat selection and space use overlap between feral horses, pronghorn, and greater sage-grouse in cold arid steppe. *Journal of Wildlife Management* \(early online version\).](#)

[Lapp, S., et al. 2022. Automated recognition of ruffed grouse drumming in field recordings. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* \(early online version\).](#)

[Munn, D. T., et al. 2022. Ruffed grouse do not exhibit high potential for reservoir competency of common tick-borne pathogens. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* \(early online version\).](#)

[Parker, N. J., D. S. Sullins, D. A. Haukos, K. A. Fricke, C. A. Hagen, A. A. Ahlers. 2022. Demographic effects of a megafire on a declining prairie grouse in the mixed-grass prairie. *Ecology and Evolution* \(early online version\).](#)

[Berigan, L. A., et al. 2022. Availability of lesser prairie-chicken nesting habitat impairs restoration success. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* \(early online version\).](#)

[Keever, A. C., B. A. Collier, M. J. Chamberlain, and B. S. Cohen. 2022. Early nest initiation and vegetation density enhance nest survival in Wild Turkeys. *Ornithology* \(early online version\).](#)

[Moscicki, D. J., J. H. White, J. B. Hardin, M. J. Chamberlain, and B. A. Collier. 2022. Phenology-specific space use by Rio Grande wild turkeys. *Journal of Wildlife Management* \(early online version\).](#)

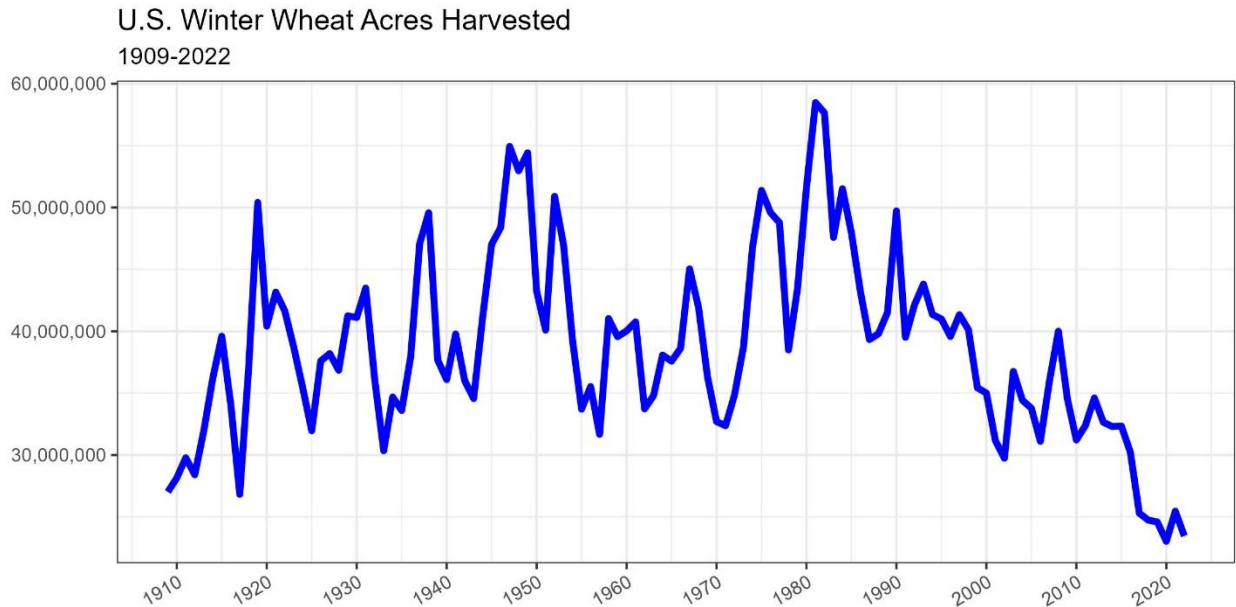
[Gonnerman, M., S. A. Shea, K. Sullivan, P. Kamath, K. Overturf, and E. Blomberg. 2022. Dynamic winter weather moderates movement and resource selection of wild turkeys at high-latitude range limits. *Ecological Applications* \(early online version\).](#)

[Allen, M. C., T. Almendinger, C. T. Barreca, and J. L. Lockwood. 2022. A lidar-based openness index to aid conservation planning for grassland wildlife. *Avian Conservation and Ecology* 17:16.](#)

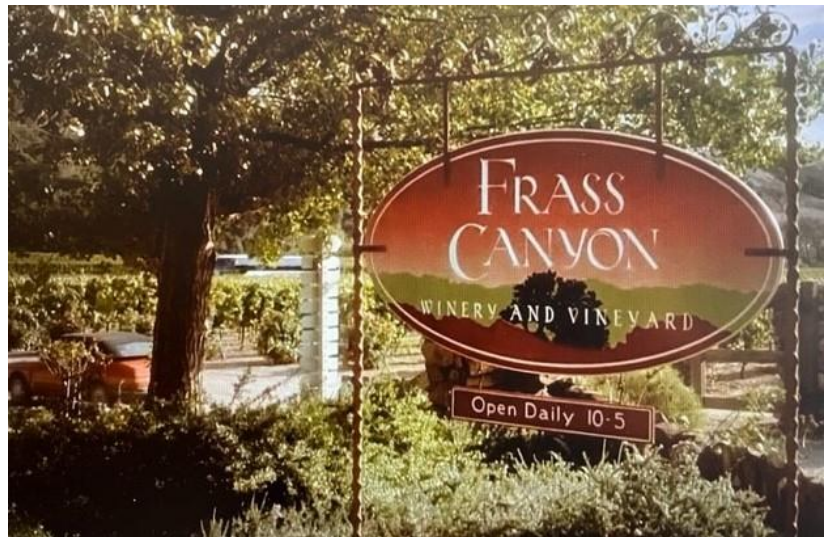
[Ryzhova, N. 2022. Cows, moonshine, pheasants... *versus* soybeans: The birth of a capitalist plantation in the Amur village. *Inner Asia* 24:53-73.](#)

Trivia Answer

1981, with 58,476,000 acres of winter wheat harvested. This past summer U.S. farmers harvested 23,459,000 acres, down 61% from the peak and the second lowest on record. Although we often focus on the decline of CRP, the loss of wheat acres no doubt makes the challenges pheasants face doubly steep.



As an aside, we learned in last month's trivia answer that "frass" is the excrement of insect larvae. I had only recently stumbled upon that word in the title of a journal article and had to look it up. Then I was rewatching the movie *Sideways* the other day and what should appear but – frass. In the movie, "Frass Canyon" winery is an establishment the wine-loving protagonist loathes (its product "tasting like the back of an LA school bus"), but his friend insists they stop there on their road trip



and hijinks ensue. I don't know how many audience members got the joke, but it can't be many. I'm a bit embarrassed that some Hollywood writer knew a biology-related term that I didn't know, but my appreciation for that scene has been forever enhanced.

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 <https://nationalpheasantplan.org>.