

Pheasant News and Notes

July 2023



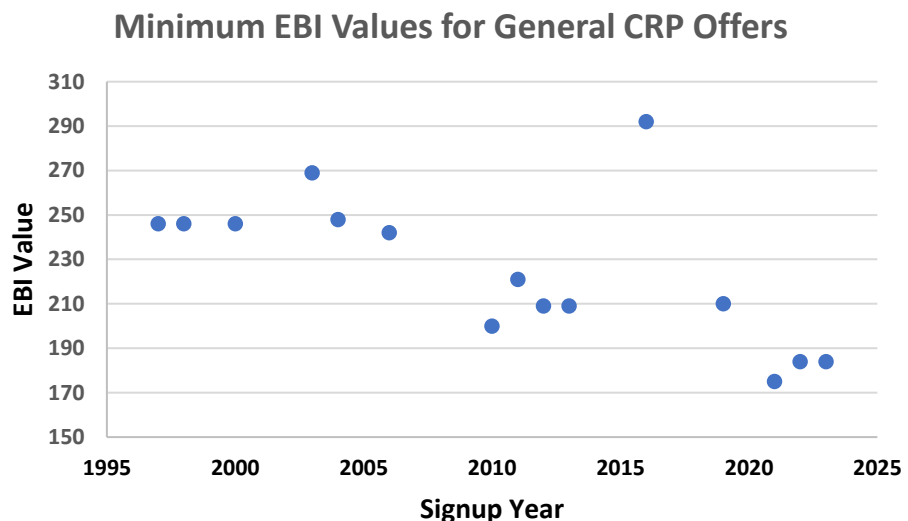
Trivia Question

What recently deceased author described pheasants as crossing the road “with their heads bowed like wrongdoers.”

USDA and Legislative News

There were a couple of big news items this month. The first was [the USDA’s announcement of the results of the 2023 General Conservation Reserve Program \(CRP\) signup](#). USDA received enrollment offers on 1,185,888 acres and accepted 1,065,409 of them for entry into the program as of this coming October, for a 90% acceptance rate. The national average annual rental rate for the accepted acreage was \$64 per acre. Accepted offers had to meet or exceed a national minimum Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) score of 184, though offers from 22 states below their historic enrollment rates only had to exceed a minimum threshold of 174. After the initial announcement, FSA also [invited](#) those with expiring CRP contracts who were not initially accepted for reenrollment to have their offers reevaluated using an older soil erosion model, so the final number of acres accepted might increase a bit.

Todd Bogenschutz (Technical Committee, Iowa) noted the minimum EBI criterion was the same as last year’s signup but remains historically low. This suggests getting accepted in the General signup is not as difficult as it used to be, probably due to the decline in the number of acres being offered. It also suggests we are



getting fewer environmental benefits per acre enrolled than we did historically, though changes in how the EBI has been calculated over the years make direct comparisons difficult.

A total of 1,971,883 General and Continuous signup acres are [scheduled to expire this year](#), which means we need to enroll over 900,000 acres in Continuous practices by October to break even. USDA [reported](#) 761,000 acres had been enrolled as of mid-June, so thankfully we are already within shouting distance of that figure.

In other major news, Robert Bonnie, NRCS's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, [reportedly announced](#) an investment of at least \$500 million over the next five years into USDA's wildlife conservation efforts, primarily delivered through its Working Lands for Wildlife Program. The new funding includes \$250 million from the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program and \$250 million from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Funding will be distributed to NRCS's four current Frameworks for Conservation Action (Great Plains Grasslands; Sagebrush Biome; Northern Bobwhite, Grasslands, and Savannas; and Western Water and Working Lands) and four new frameworks to be released in 2024-25 (Western Migratory Big Game, Eastern Deciduous Forest, Eastern Aquatic Connectivity, and Southeastern Pine Ecosystems). FSA will assist with conservation efforts in the current frameworks through the CRP, but it is unclear exactly what if any programmatic changes to CRP will occur to facilitate this (I wasn't able to find an actual USDA press release on this matter, so the details may still be in development).

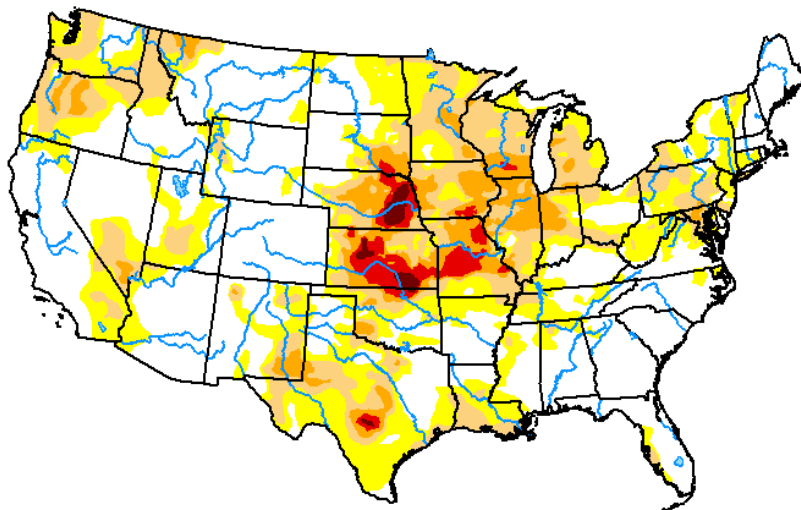
We certainly applaud USDA's ramped up commitment to wildlife conservation efforts through this initiative. It seems bobwhites should clearly benefit (they are the only species actually named in any of the existing frameworks) but, as with the other large sums that USDA is trying to quickly spend, it will be a challenge to increase capacity (read: hire and train people, create on-the-ground delivery protocols, etc.) fast enough to make fully efficient use of the dollars. State agencies and NGOs may well be called upon to help make this happen. Stay tuned!

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

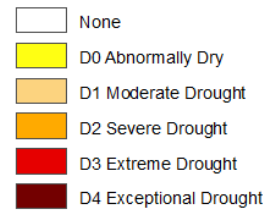
Bryan O'Connor is the new Upland Game Program Manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Bryan replaces John Laux in the position, who is now the Permanent Habitat Protection Programs Manager for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever. We welcome Bryan to the Technical Committee and wish him well in the new job!

Knock on wood, but pheasant numbers seem to be on the upswing in the Prairie Pothole states. North Dakota reported increases in their 2022 pheasant harvest and 2023 spring crow counts of 10% and 30%, respectively, even with near-record snowfall in some parts of the state this past winter. South Dakota reported last fall's harvest remained above one million birds and was slightly higher than the 1.11 million roosters harvested in 2021-22. Finally, Iowa's weather model currently predicts an upcoming fall population greater than last year's, and last year wasn't too bad if I remember correctly. Here's hoping that the region's good fortune continues and is shared by all the pheasant states. We'll know more in a couple of months when several states complete their August brood counts.

July is the month we usually start to see CRP acres get mowed in and around counties where drought emergencies have been declared. The National Drought Mitigation Center's July 4th map for the continental U.S. (below) is not as red-soaked as it's been in some recent years, but the middle of the pheasant range remains "severely" dry or worse.



Intensity:



The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:

Curtis Riganti
National Drought Mitigation Center

Under current USDA policies, 100% of the CRP acres in a qualifying county can be hayed or grazed as soon as the state-specific Primary Nesting Season (PNS) is over; PNS end dates for most pheasant states are somewhere in the July 1st to August 1st range. In the good old days, landowners could only harvest 50% of a field's acres during a drought emergency, but this cap was administratively removed sometime around the 2018 Farm Bill's inception. Since that change, twice as much potential fall and winter cover has disappeared each year in the drought-stricken parts of the pheasant range, which has been bad news for both pheasants and pheasant hunters. Hopefully conservation interests can get some of the old protections at least partially reinstated in the upcoming Farm Bill revision or its associated administrative rules.

Pheasant-relevant Media

- [USDA accepts more than 1 million acres in offers through Conservation Reserve Program general signup](#)
- [USDA announces investment in wildlife conservation](#)
- [North Dakota's spring pheasant crowing counts up statewide](#)
- [North Dakota upland game bird harvest in 2022 increases from previous year](#)
- [Iowa DNR projects strong pheasant population leading into August survey](#)
- [South Dakota GFP releases latest harvest numbers](#)
- [New York's pheasant hunting season will not be cancelled, stocking resumes at state game farm](#)
- [Agriculture funding bill passes House committee](#)
- [USDA could use the Farm Bill's conservation title for climate change](#)
- [Eight ways to write a river-friendly Farm Bill](#)
- [Pesticide lobby pushes Farm Bill amendment to strip localities and states from restricting pesticides](#)
- [Bringing oats back to American farms](#)

Recent Literature

- [Jahren, T., M. Lian, and T. Willebrand. 2023. Evaluating effects from releasing hand-reared common pheasant \(*Phasianus colchicus*\) and grey partridge \(*Perdix perdix*\) on biological diversity and animal welfare in Norway. Research Report, Innlandet 13.](#)

[Smith, K. T., et al. 2023. Response of greater sage-grouse to sagebrush reduction treatments in Wyoming big sagebrush. Wildlife Monographs 212:1 \(e1075\).](#)

[Dierenfeld, E. S., L. C. Larsson, A. C. Pratt, and S. K. Sherrod. 2023. Liver fatty acid, mineral, and fat-soluble nutrients in wild and captive greater prairie-chickens. Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management 14:195-204.](#)

[Ulrey, E. E., M. J. Chamberlain, and B. A. Collier. 2023. Reproductive asynchrony within social groups of female eastern wild turkeys. Ecology and Evolution 13:e10171.](#)

[Ghasemi, B., and G. T. Kyle. 2023. Hunters' opposition to harmful hunting practices on ecosystems: values, beliefs, norms, and identities. Journal of Wildlife Management \(early online version\).](#)

[Jones, W. D. 2023. Natural resource enterprises – income diversification and land conservation on privately owned lands in the United States \(U.S.\). Human Dimensions of Wildlife \(online version\).](#)

[Murphy, T. L. 2023. Assessment of Conservation Reserve Program enhancements at contract renewal: impact on monarch butterfly \(*Danaus plexippus*\) habitat. Thesis, University of Northern Iowa. 47pp.](#)

Trivia Answer

Cormac McCarthy, in *The Passenger*, his penultimate novel. His passing last month garnered quite a bit of media attention even though he famously avoided the press. In a rare interview he said, “There's no such thing as life without bloodshed. I think the notion that the species can be improved in some way, that everyone could live in harmony, is a really dangerous idea. Those who are afflicted with this notion are the first ones to give up their souls, their freedom. Your desire that it be that way will enslave you and make your life vacuous.” Not exactly the kind of thing you’re likely to hear on *The Tonight Show*.

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>.