

Pheasant News and Notes

October 2023



Trivia Question

What is “bardo”?

USDA and Legislative News

In a surprise over the weekend, the federal government avoided a shutdown with a bipartisan continuing resolution that will keep the lights on for another 45 days. A shutdown would have shuttered county USDA offices where hundreds of Farm Bill Biologists and other partnership staff work, causing widespread furloughs and serious doubts about whether back pay would be afforded to non-government contractors once a shutdown ended. Those concerns are now postponed all the way until next month.

Although no shutdown occurred, the 2018 Farm Bill expired on Sunday. As a reminder, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022 provided funding for many NRCS programs such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) through FY2028, so new contracts for those programs can be signed regardless of the Farm Bill expiration. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was not included in the IRA, so no new contracts or modifications are possible until a new bill or extension is authorized.

Relatedly, NRCS announced its [list of “Climate Smart” practices](#) for FY2024, which qualifies those listed for expanded IRA funding through EQIP and CSP. Prescribed burning, brush management, and herbaceous weed treatment in rangeland and pastureland settings are now on the list. USDA also defined [new IRA eligibility qualifications](#) for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

We held our fall National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan Management Board meeting in Calgary last month in conjunction with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) annual conference. Ron Leathers (Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever’s Chief Conservation Officer) announced that PF&QF had reached an agreement with USDA-FSA to help employ over \$4 million in CRP Monitoring, Evaluation, and Assessment funds over the next five years. The grant covers a variety of CRP-related subjects and outcomes, including development of models and tools to help predict pheasant responses to habitat changes in a return-on-investment context – one of our partnership’s highest priority work items. As Plan Coordinator I will help shepherd this work among several subcontractors, thus the grant will cover part of my position’s expenses for the next few years.

The attending Board members discussed how this could affect state contributions to my position going forward, including how any “extra” funds could be used for other Plan-related items. A number of Board members were unable to travel to Calgary, so it was decided that another virtual meeting should be held this fall to finalize decisions on funding issues. In the meantime, the Board would like the

Technical Committee to make some recommendations regarding other work items that would be high priorities to fund. This will be a discussion item at the Tech Committee's annual meeting this month in Oregon, Ohio.

Among my notes from the rest of the AFWA meeting:

- There was much less “news” than usual at the Farm Bill-related committee and working group meetings given that Washington was focused on a potential shutdown, which in turn had delayed progress on Farm Bill negotiations. Everyone seemed stuck in “wait-and-see” mode.
- The Private Lands Working Group conducted a survey of state wildlife agencies regarding training needs for their private lands biologists. Most agencies thought their needs would be best served by state-specific curricula delivered either by their own staff or with the assistance of an outside vendor. More survey results ([long-version](#) and a [summary fact sheet](#)) are now available on AFWA's web page. The working group is also making progress on a recommended training framework for entry-level private lands biologists.
- A report entitled “[How States Shape Wildlife Conservation on Private Lands: A 50-State Analysis](#)” was released earlier this year by the Property and Environment Research Center (PERC). Lots of interesting information, although the organization's point of view clearly shows in the discussion of some of the items.
- The states seem fairly steadfast against moving CRP from an acre-based to a dollar-based program. Jen Mock Schaeffer advised the National Bobwhite and Grasslands Initiative Management Board that when the Farm Bill easement programs were changed to dollar-based, funding for the programs was subsequently cut in half. She added that increased state flexibility could work against wildlife conservation interests because local USDA decision-making committees could more easily subvert the intent of the program. I'm not sure comparisons between permanent easement programs and CRP are in the apples-to-apples category, but it is a historic precedent that is hard to discount.
- The next federal listing decision for the monarch butterfly is due in September 2024. There is concern that not many NRCS practices provide specific benefits to monarchs, thus making it harder to address monarch-specific concerns through those practices as currently defined.
- The 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation is nearly completed (the survey was scheduled for 2021 but delayed due to Covid). Some top-line results were released at the meeting: more than 14 million people (5.5% of the U.S. population) hunted in 2022, spending about \$45 billion. In the 2016 survey, 11.5 million hunters spent \$26.2 billion, although these figures may not be directly comparable due to changes in methodology. Sadly, this is the first national survey that lacks species-specific hunter estimates, so we will no longer be able to track national trends in pheasant hunter participation or spending via its results. Perhaps this partnership could think about filling that void.

The Midwest Landscape Initiative's (MLI's) [Midwest Conservation Blueprint](#) is now live and online. It synthesizes spatial priorities for more than 20 social and environmental objectives across the member states of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA). The Blueprint base map weights all the objectives equally; those who would like to pick and choose among the objectives or weight them unequally can [download the individual layer data](#) and synthesize things however they like.

Last but not least, Jim Inglis (Management Board, Pheasants Forever) was recently honored by Mississippi State University as one of eight [2023 Alumni Fellows](#), and the sole honoree from the College of Forest Resources. Congratulations, Jim!

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Pheasants Forever's 2023 national pheasant hunting forecast](#)

[Iowa could be looking at its biggest pheasant season in years](#)

[Pheasant population explodes in southwestern Minnesota](#)

[North Dakota pheasant hunters can expect a good season](#)

[What to look out for in the upcoming ND pheasant hunting season](#)

[Despite harsh winter, biologists expect strong SD pheasant numbers](#)

[Biden vetoes efforts to strip protections for lesser prairie-chickens, northern long-eared bats](#)

[Farm Bill 2023: NRCS backlogs and the conservation bardo](#)

[At 97, WWII Iwo Jima veteran gets opportunity to pheasant hunt with grandson](#)

[From the rear end of a pheasant, Brazil's best coffee](#)

Recent Literature

[Sinnott, E. A., et al. 2023. Northern bobwhite breeding season and nest survival are greater on native grasslands. *Journal of Wildlife Management* \(early online version\).](#)

[Ruzicka, R. E., D. Rollins, P. F. Doherty, Jr., and W. L. Kendall. 2023. Longer holding times decrease dispersal but increase mortality of translocated scaled quail. *Journal of Wildlife Management* \(early online version\).](#)

[Gehrt, J. M., D. S. Sullins, B. H. F. Verheijen, and D. A. Haukos. 2023. Lesser Prairie-chicken incubation behavior and nest success most influenced by nest vegetation structure. *Ecology and Evolution* 13:e10509.](#)

[Nelson, S. D., et al. 2023. Age-based shifts in habitat selection of wild turkey broods. *Journal of Wildlife Management* \(early online version\).](#)

[Carl, A. R., D. W. Londe, R. D. Elmore, S. D. Fuhlendorf, and C. A. Davis. 2023. Habitat selection of female Rio Grande wild turkey influenced by vegetation and anthropogenic structures. *Rangeland Ecology and Management* 91:44-54.](#)

[Gallman, C. W., T. W. Arnold, E. S. Michel, and J. D. Stafford. 2023. Evaluation of fall-seeded cover crops for grassland nesting waterfowl in eastern South Dakota. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* \(early online version\).](#)

[Harris, K. M., D. M. Hall, and D. L. Finke. 2023. Who cares about monarch butterflies? Comparing US State Wildlife Action Plans 2015–2025. *Conservation Letters* \(early online version\).](#)

[Van Buskirk, A. N., B. B. Boley, C. H. Killmaster, K. L. Johannsen, and G. J. D'Angelo. 2023. Does survey branding matter for human dimensions of natural resources research? A case study of university- and government-branded surveys. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* \(early online version\).](#)

[Wolcott, D. M., J. R. Herkert, C. A. Ribic, R. B. Renfrew, and D. W. Sample. 2023. Potential impacts of land-management schedules on grassland bird nests and fledglings. Wildlife Society Bulletin \(early online version\).](#)

[Stevens, H. C., et al. 2023. Species-specific ecological traits, phylogeny, and geography underpin vulnerability to population declines for North American birds. Ornithological Applications \(early online version\).](#)

[Mitterwallner, V., et al. 2023. Automated visitor and wildlife monitoring with camera traps and machine learning. Remote Sensing in Ecology and Conservation \(early online version\).](#)

Trivia Answer

“Bardo” is a Tibetan Buddhist term for the intermediate or astral state of the soul after death and before rebirth. The University of Illinois’ Jonathan Coppess [recently used](#) the term “conservation bardo” to describe the difference between the qualified applications USDA receives for conservation programs and the number they actually fund – those unfunded applications are patiently waiting to be metaphorically “born” into conservation actions and outcomes.

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>.