

Pheasant News and Notes

September 2023



Trivia Question

In what year did the North American Breeding Bird Survey begin?

USDA and Legislative News

It has been another slow month for news on the upcoming Farm Bill as legislators return from their August recess. A marker bill called the [Streamlining Conservation Practice Standards Act](#) was introduced, which would make it easier for states to adopt practices that other states have approved. But that was about it for new developments.

It appears the proposed texts for the Senate and House versions of the bill will likely be available around the end of this month, which will define the bargaining lines within and among the chambers. The most optimistic timeline for the bill to pass still looks like around the end of the calendar year.

Back in the olden days when bipartisanship was still a thing and a Farm Bill expired before a new one was passed, Congress would typically pass a continuing resolution or other extension to temporarily fund ag programs until things got settled. Although some type of extension to at least the end of the calendar year still seems possible, what happens if the current bill and/or an extension expires? It depends on the program. Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract signings would cease, but in theory USDA could keep signing, say, new Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) contracts with funding it (and most other conservation programs) received through the Inflation Reduction Act.

The real political pressure to get a new bill done will get exerted when farm commodity support programs start expiring, but that pressure will probably come more from budget hawks than farmers. When program authorizations expire, commodity support provisions in laws passed in 1938 and 1949 start to take effect; these are referred to as “permanent law.” These laws are set up much differently than current Farm Bill provisions and could end up forcing USDA to start buying commodities to increase market prices to antiquated target levels, a system that is predicted to cost billions more than what is currently budgeted for today’s programs. You can read more about the fun and interesting things that could happen under a reversion to permanent law [here](#). Because they are so fun and interesting, Congress is not likely to let them happen.

Finally, the USDA’s Working Lands for Wildlife program and its partners have created a “[Landscape Explorer](#)” website that makes it possible to view land cover changes between the 1950s and now anywhere in the western half of the U.S. If you’re like me, you can watch some good pheasant and quail habitat get turned into the neighborhood where you now live and realize that you, too, are participating in that seemingly perpetual process. Thanks to Mark Norton (South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks) for passing along the link.

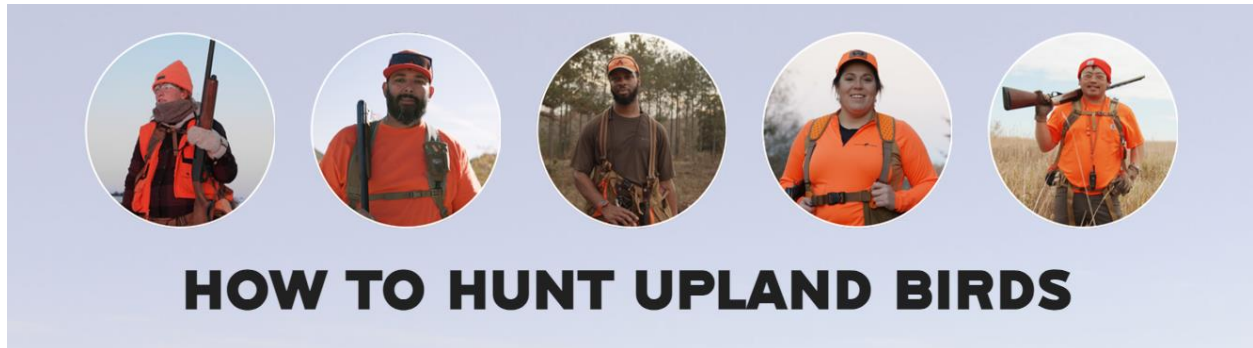
Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Several states have finalized their summer counts and are in various stages of pushing information out to the media. Overall it seems the news is better the farther north you go. Preliminary information suggests the Southern Plains didn't get good precipitation until later in the nesting season, so counts were disappointing despite good-looking late summer cover conditions. Iowa's statewide pheasant index is the highest it's been in eight years, western Minnesota saw solid increases, and North Dakota's counts are up substantially despite near-record snowfall in parts of the state this past winter.

Below are a few "mixed bag" scenes from roadside surveys in Iowa this year – thanks to Todd Bogenschutz (Technical Committee, Iowa DNR) for passing them along.



Hunting forecasts turn our thoughts to the upcoming season, and there is a new set of online resources available to upland bird hunters of all skill levels. According to Colby Kerber (Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever's Director of Conservation Education Programs), [How to Hunt Upland Birds](#) was developed by PF&QF alongside our partners at Modern Carnivore with input from Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA), Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW), Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA), Minority Outdoor Alliance (MOA), North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA), and Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS). This joint effort was made possible by a modern multistate conservation grant cooperatively administered by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).



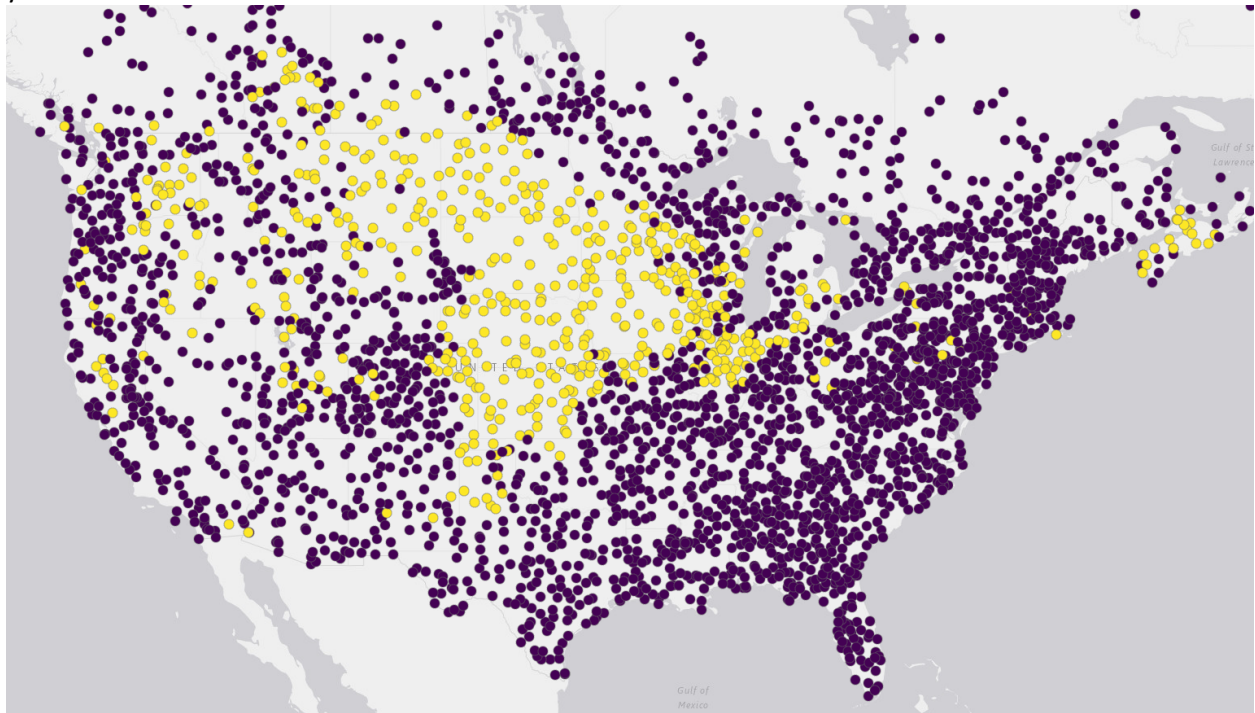
For those of you that regularly interact with hunters, we really want to capture the energy around this unique project to educate, engage, and expand upland hunting, so please help us guide as many folks as possible there. Thanks in advance!

In other PF&QF news, Ariel Wiegard was [recently named](#) Vice President of Governmental Affairs. Ariel most recently served as Director of Government Relations for the American Soybean Association, and formerly worked as director of the Center for Agriculture & Private Lands for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. We welcome Ariel aboard!

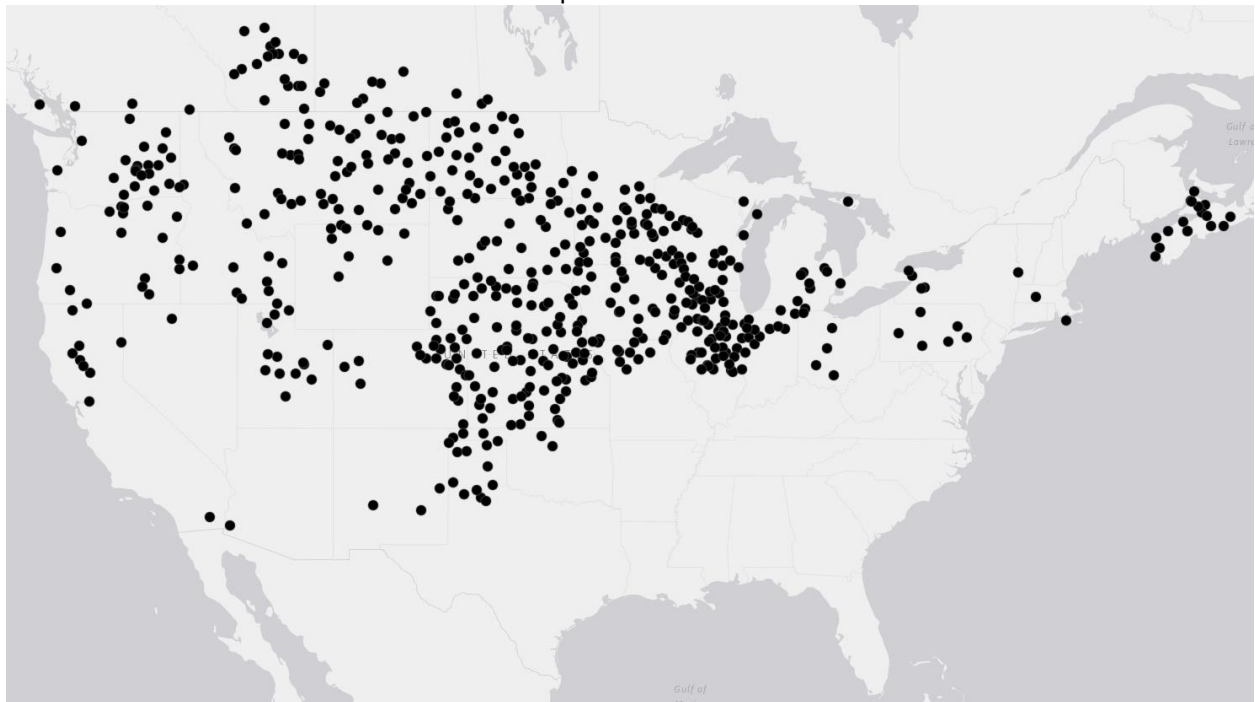
Finally, for states not fortunate enough to run their own pheasant surveys, most instead rely on North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) results to ascertain trends. About 3,000 BBS routes are surveyed each spring across the continental U.S. and Canada by expert birders, with some routes being run as far back as 1966. All bird species seen or heard at survey points (50 points per route, 0.5 miles apart) are recorded. As great as that data set is, its results take a while to become available – the survey's [online results reporting tool](#) only includes results through 2019, and [offline results](#) through 2021 only became available earlier this year. The U.S. Geological Survey does make the minimally processed count data available about a year after the survey period, so the 2022 data set was just recently released.

The index and trend analyses performed by USGS are fairly complex and computationally intensive, so I've not tried to replicate their historic pheasant results with the 2022 data. However, I have done some simpler summarizations to answer a few questions with the newest counts.

The first question was simply where pheasants were currently found. The map below shows the starting points of BBS routes that were run in at least three years during 2017-2022 (none was run in 2020 because of Covid), with routes where pheasants were detected at least twice since 2017 shown in yellow.

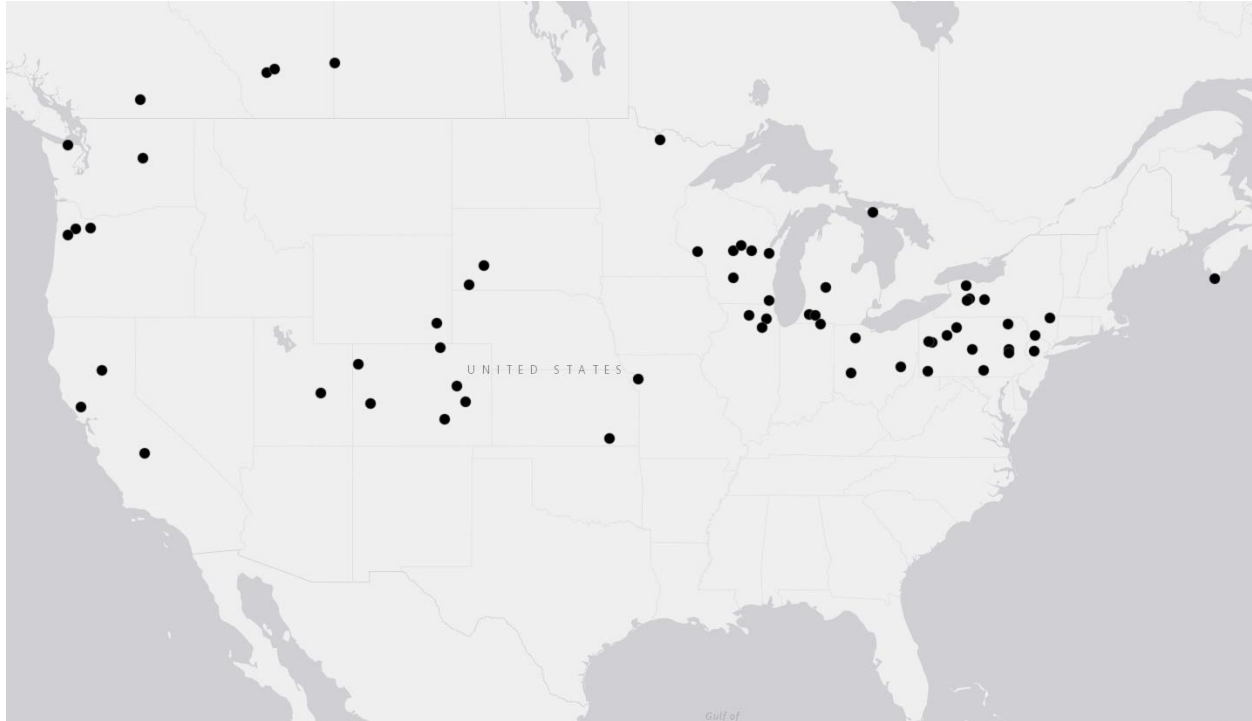


It's a little easier to see if we get rid of the routes where pheasants weren't detected at least twice. Two dots in Alaska's Kenai Peninsula are off the map.



Although most releases of pen-raised birds occur in the fall and winter, and most released birds have died before the BBS's summer counting period, it is always possible that some detections are of pen-raised males. Something to keep in mind when viewing the maps.

Next, I mapped routes that had pheasant detections at least twice during 2011-2016 but none during 2017-2022, showing only those that were run at least three years during both periods.



These represent areas where wild populations may have been lost (or nearly so) in the last five years, or where a few pen-raised birds occasionally hang on long enough to muddy the waters.

The BBS data set is big enough that it can be sliced and diced in many different ways, but as mentioned it comes with some caveats. Besides the pen-raised bird and delayed availability issues, the survey's June sample period is well past the time rooster crowing has peaked, so it may detect a smaller fraction of the birds that are actually there compared to state-sponsored surveys run in April and May.

Still, it is often the best tool with which to answer multi-state or range-wide questions, or at least provides a good starting point. If I can help anyone obtain or use the new 2022 data set, let me know.

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Pheasant numbers jump up in southwestern Minnesota](#)

[Iowa pheasant count best since 2015](#)

[Pelee Island mayor answers questions about demolition of pheasant farm](#)

[Pheasants Forever unveils new hunting access program in South Dakota](#)

[Pheasants Forever CEO, others: Congress should build on CRP's impressive record of success](#)

[Senators announce measure to streamline conservation at USDA](#)

[Shift to row crops for biofuels linked to decline in grassland birds in North Dakota, study finds](#)

[North American grassland birds in peril, spurring all-out effort to save birds and their habitat](#)
[Commercial rodenticide found in birds of prey](#)
[As the climate changes, wild turkeys aren't keeping up](#)
[Here's how you go birding in the middle of the night](#)

Recent Literature

[LeBeau, C., K. Smith, S. Howlin, A. Tredinnick, and K. Kosciuch. 2023. A meta-analysis investigating the effects of energy infrastructure proximity on grouse demography and space use. *Wildlife Biology* \(early online version\).](#)

[Boone, W. W., et al. 2023. Minimal shift of eastern wild turkey nesting phenology associated with projected climate change. *Climate Change Ecology* 6:100075.](#)

[von Furstenberg, R., et al. 2023. Evaluating impacts of R3 workshops for first-time hunters at universities across the United States. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* \(early online version\).](#)

[Emmet, R. L., K. W. Stoloda, T. J. Benson, and M. L. Allen. 2023. Effects of multiple aspects of anthropogenic landscape change on mesopredator relative abundance. *Wildlife Research* \(early online version\).](#)

[Casola, W. R., H. M. Desrochers, and M. N. Peterson. 2023. Evaluating the false consensus effect in private landowner perceptions of hunting. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* \(early online version\).](#)

Trivia Answer

1966.

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>.