

# Pheasant News and Notes

April 2024



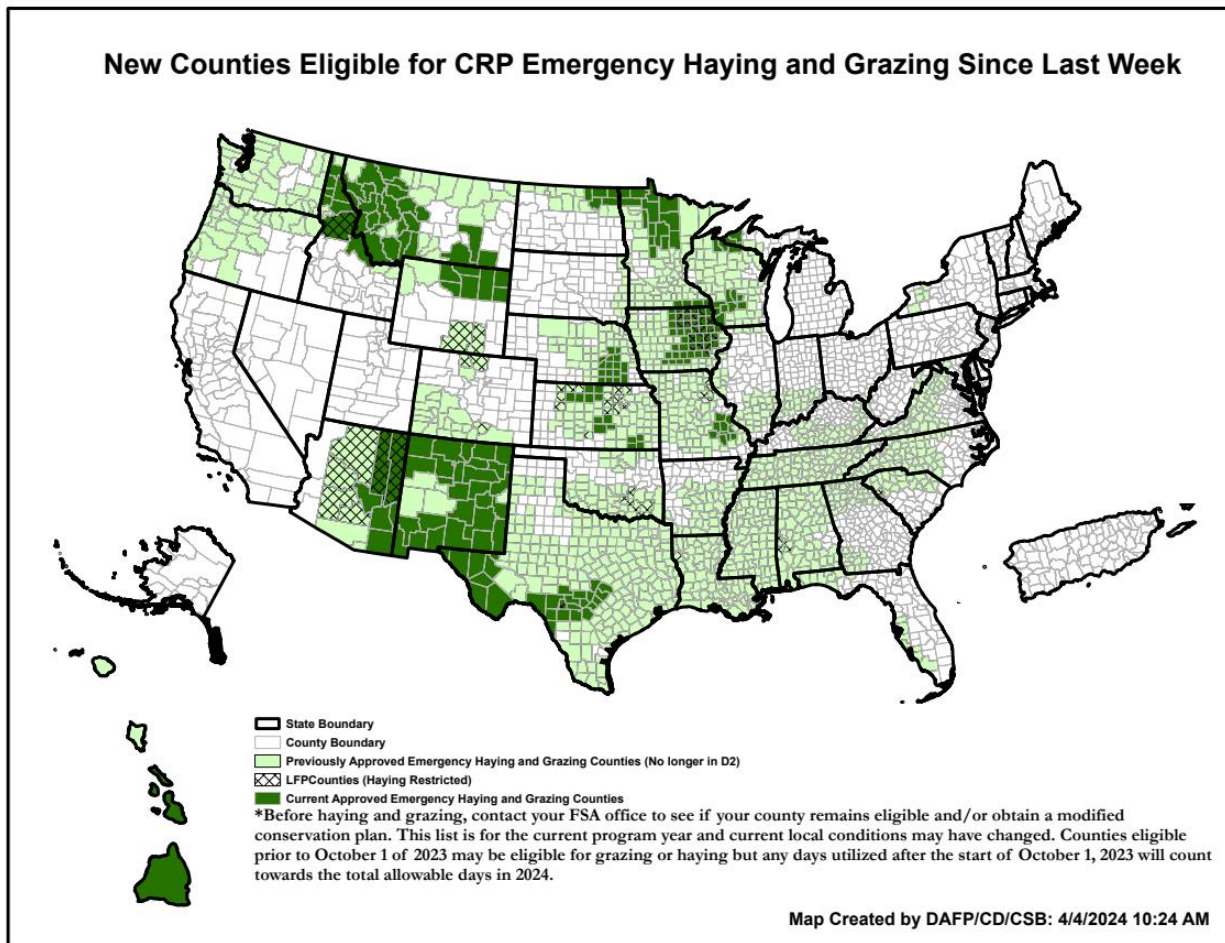
## Trivia Question

Who wrote the following?:

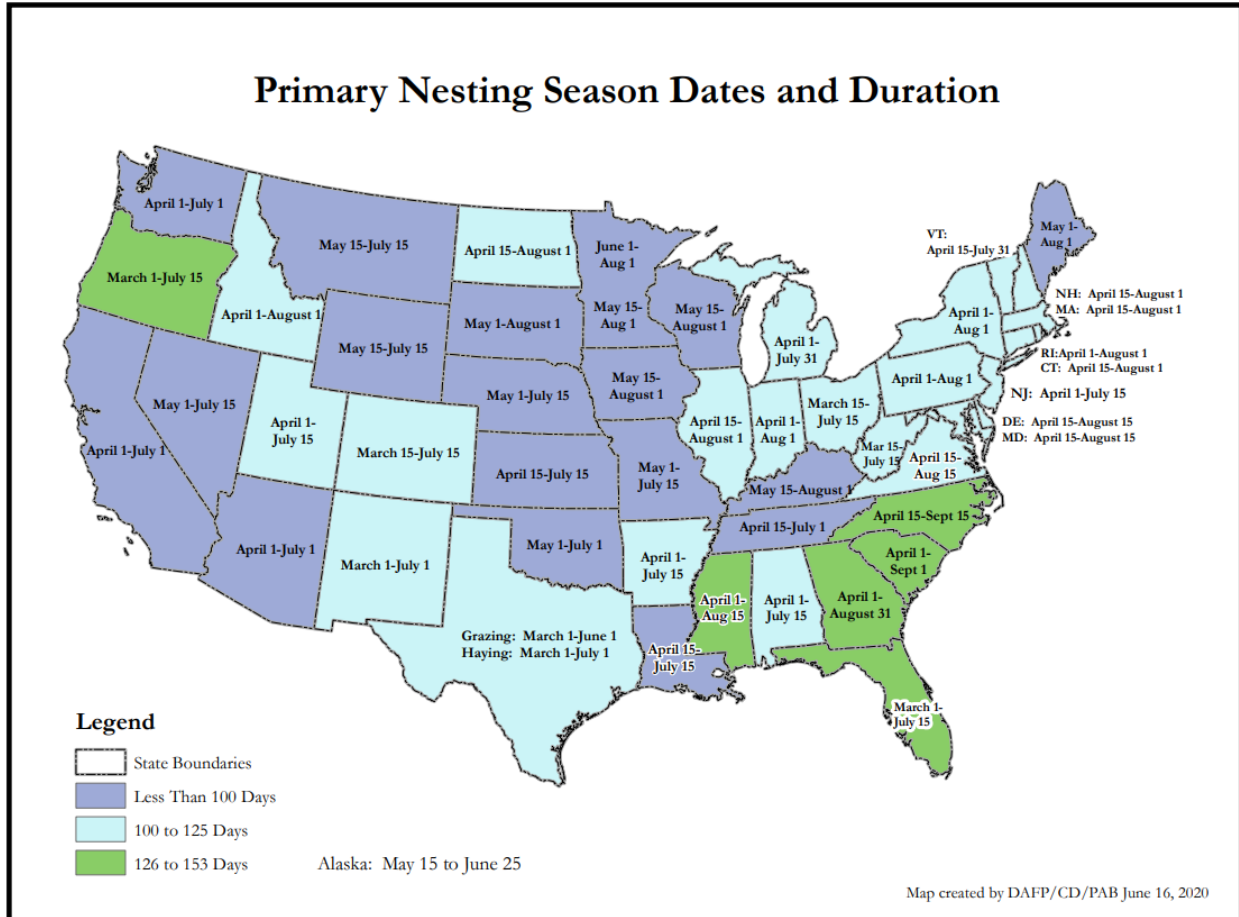
*“The idea that the future is unpredictable is undermined every day by the ease with which the past is explained [in hindsight]. ... We are prone to overestimate how much we understand about the world and to underestimate the role of chance in events. ... The notion that we have limited access to the workings of our minds is difficult to accept because, naturally, it is alien to our experience, but it is true: you know far less about yourself than you feel you do.”*

## USDA and Legislative News

USDA recently revised their [CRP emergency haying and grazing](#) eligibility map based on the wildfires in Texas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska. As seems to happen in most years, large chunks of the pheasant range are included in the eligible area.



Those wanting to hay their CRP without penalty must do so before or after the primary nesting season; the state-specific PNS dates are shown below. Grazing at 50% of the USDA-defined carrying capacity is allowed during the PNS. All the rules for different haying and grazing scenarios can be found [here](#).



Whether we would prefer haying to occur before or after the PNS is a “pick your poison” situation. Haying after the PNS, which is probably most common, saves that year’s nesting cover but often eliminates the field’s huntable cover that fall and reduces the quality of next year’s early nesting cover, particularly if conditions remained dry. Haying prior to the PNS sacrifices that year’s nesting activity but has a better chance of minimizing effects in the fall or following spring. Neither option is great; let’s just hope it rains soon in the affected areas.

In better news, last month Congress and the President agreed to fund USDA for the rest of FY2024, so their funding authorization now matches the expiration date of the previously extended Farm Bill. This should allow our partner positions and CRP signups to run unencumbered until October, when the whole process starts over again.

More Farm Bill and USDA gossip and predictions are detailed below.

### Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

The National Pheasant Plan Management Board met last month at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Representatives from Ohio (Mike Reynolds),

Idaho (Sal Palazzolo), Kansas (Jake George), Nebraska (Alicia Hardin), Iowa (Todd Bogenschutz), and Pheasants Forever (Ariel Wiegard, along with Andrew Schmidt and Jess McGuire) were in attendance.

Among my meeting notes:

- Chair Alicia Hardin called the meeting to order, and Ariel Wiegard provided a legislative update. Farm Bill legislation does not appear to be moving at the moment, and current forecasts suggest Congress will not take up the bill until after the election. The \$10 million in FY2024 Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Improvement Program (VPA-HIP) funding that was included in the Farm Bill extension is still awaiting guidance for its distribution to the states. These funds need to be obligated to the states (but not necessarily spent by them) by October 1. During the recent General CRP signup period, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever purchased about 2,300 radio ads promoting the signup in key markets. There are about 400,000 acres of CRP expiring as of October 1, including about 50,000 acres of General signup acres.
- The Plan Coordinator reported he had begun charging some of his time to PF&QF's grant with USDA-FSA for several CRP-related science deliverables. This work includes helping oversee contractors delivering pheasant abundance prediction models, assessing CRP effects on species or greatest conservation need, and compiling a searchable CRP literature compendium.
- State cash contributions pledged to the Plan Coordinator position slipped from \$105,400 last year to \$97,900 this year. We should be able to absorb this shortfall using the grant funding described above.
- The Plan Coordinator presented some new range-wide nesting habitat trends and metrics. The National Plan provided this information through 2019, but newly available data from FSA and the 2022 Census of Agriculture allow calculations through 2023. Since 2017 (the last year for which Census of Agriculture data were available), the quantity and quality of nesting habitat (as indexed by CRP Acre Equivalents, the Plan's nesting habitat metric) has fallen 10%. The Plan's goal was an increase of 43%, so we are now about 50% below the national goal. Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, South Dakota, and North Dakota were the only states with increases in CAEs over the last six years.
- The Management Board reiterated its desire for the Plan Coordinator and Technical Committee to develop a white paper on lethal predator management. At their meeting last fall, some Tech Committee members expressed a desire for a position paper on the topic, so the Board was asked to clarify whether a not a position was requested. Since we lacked a quorum, Board members will be asked to vote on this question via email after the meeting.

Among my other notes from the North American conference:

- During the plenary session, Francine Madden of the Center for Conservation Peacebuilding spoke about human physiological and psychological traits that can hinder collaborative problem-solving. People experiencing fear have elevated brain activity in the amygdala, which in turn lowers the rational reasoning capacity of in the prefrontal cortex. Prejudice against "the other" is also hardwired into our brains and cannot be overcome without effort. Fights about conservation issues are often just platforms for people's deeper fears about threats to their identities, and when threatening decisions or processes are perceived as fundamentally unfair, they react with "revenge anger." Those working on contentious issues need to anticipate these conditions and build communication structures that do not unwittingly evoke fear or threaten deeper identities.
- Besides the Farm Bill, other key bills like the North American Grasslands Conservation Act and the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) are adding sponsors and supporters but will not

be moved forward this year. RAWA appears to have at or near the 60 Senate votes it would need for a filibuster-proof margin, but no companion bill has been introduced in the House.

- In the CRP Working Group meeting, T.J. Wilson of FSA gave the principal federal update. FSA will likely seek to increase enrolled acres to near the current 27-million-acre statutory cap this fiscal year; about 24.8 million acres are currently enrolled. FSA has developed an online “CRP 101” course to help train staff about the program, but it is not accessible to those outside the federal system. The group talked about the possibility of housing a copy of the information on a non-government server that would be accessible to all. There was a lot of state interest in the pilot program in Wyoming that allows EQIP funding to pay for conservation practices on acres already enrolled in Grasslands CRP, which was recently expanded to Montana and Idaho. The states would like this to be available nationally. On a related note, T.J. reminded the group that CREPs are available within Grasslands CRP, and three such programs are underway. As part of a discussion about possible statutory language changes, lawmakers seem to be exploring ways of limiting enrollment of “prime farmland” into CRP, particularly in General signups. Andrew Schmidt (Director of Government Affairs, PF&QF) mentioned that it would benefit our community if we could find at least some way to comply with this desire without seriously hampering conservation outcomes. The desire by some to change the program from an acre-based to a dollar-based program has apparently been dropped, but there still is support for allowing more state discretion in how the program operates.
- In the Resident Game Bird Working Group meeting, Todd Bogenschutz (Technical Committee, Iowa) talked about the DNR’s approach to improve their small game hunter survey sampling scheme. They have added three short screening questions about a hunter’s activities the previous year, and subsample hunters after the season according to their responses. This should provide harvest and hunter number estimates with much smaller confidence intervals. We also had a wide-ranging discussion about the role the group could play in maintaining information about the effects of lethal predator removal. Several states are dealing with legislative proposals to fund statewide bounties on furbearing nest predators.
- In the National Bobwhite and Grassland Initiative Management Board meeting, John Morgan (NBGI Director) detailed the two \$25 million grants they obtained through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Each grant will serve a pair of states (Missouri and Ohio, and Mississippi and Georgia). The grants were awarded under an Alternative Funding Arrangement, which requires the funded entity (in this case the NBGI Foundation, the NBGI’s nonprofit arm) to coordinate and administer all funded activities. Since the funds are available only to reimburse qualified expenses, the Foundation needs to front the pre-reimbursed funding for activities. This is being done through 30-day advances from USDA, but this monthly hand-to-mouth funding system continues to be a challenge.
- Elsewhere during the NBGI meeting, Jen Mock (the NBGI Foundation’s legislative liaison) mentioned her work with the American Wildlife Conservation Partners and their latest Wildlife for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century report. In that report, they calculated that federal spending for natural resources and the environment had been reduced by 50% since the 1970s when adjusted for inflation, and now makes up less than 1% of federal discretionary expenditures.

## **Pheasant-relevant Media**

[Minnesota DNR seeks input on updates to pheasant and waterfowl plans](#)

[South Dakota GFP seeks public’s input on a pheasant action plan](#)

[USDA authorizes Conservation Reserve Program graze and hay donations to wildfire-impacted livestock producers in Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas](#)  
[Creature that vanished from Pa.'s farms, fields a decade ago reintroduced by game commission](#)  
[USDA announces \\$1.5 billion investment to help farmers with conservation, climate-smart agriculture](#)  
[First human case of avian flu in Texas raises alarm](#)  
[New online fair chase and hunter ethics module launched](#)  
['Gamechanger' Scottish wildlife law passes final vote](#)  
[No installation required: how WebAssembly is changing scientific computing](#)

## **Recent Literature**

[Green, R. E., et al. 2024. Outcomes from monitoring the fourth year of a five-year voluntary transition from hunting with lead to non-lead shotgun ammunition in Britain. \*Conservation Evidence\*, 21, 6-12.](#)

[Smith, K. T., A. C. Pratt, J. D. Lautenbach, H. M. North, J. L. Beck. 2024. Survival of juvenile sage-grouse in Wyoming. \*Wildlife Biology\* e01199.](#)

[Zimmerman, S. J., C. L. Aldridge, M. A. Schroeder, J. A. Fike, R. S. Cornman, and S. J. Oyler-McCance. 2024. The potential influence of genome-wide adaptive divergence on conservation translocation outcome in an isolated greater sage-grouse population. \*Conservation Biology\* \(early online version\).](#)

[Cutting, K. A., et al. 2024. Heterogenous resources across sagebrush type are associated with components of offspring fitness in an avian habitat specialist. \*Biological Conservation\* 293:110552.](#)

[Paredes-Acuna, A. G., et al. 2024. Variation of the Montezuma quail's diet in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. \*Rangeland Ecology and Management\* 94:95-105.](#)

[Geary, B., L. Williams, C. R. Long, R. M. Tyl, and R. B. Gagne. 2024. Christmas Bird Count data are a reliable harvest-independent index for Ruffed Grouse monitoring in the eastern United States. \*Ornithological Applications\* \(early online version\).](#)

[Johnson, F. A., et al. 2024. Using the R package \*popharvest\* to assess the sustainability of offtake in birds. \*Ecology and Evolution\* 14:e11059.](#)

[Goebel, K. M., D. E. Andersen, P. J. Rice, N. M. Davros. 2024. Effects of insecticide spray drift on arthropod prey resources of birds in grasslands in Minnesota. \*Journal of Wildlife Management\* \(early online version\).](#)

[Watson, D. F., et al. 2024. Short-term cattle grazing effects on restored Conservation Reserve Program grasslands across a steep precipitation gradient. \*Rangeland Ecology and Management\* 94:38-47.](#)

[McGovern, J. M., J. C. Giese, and L. A. Schulte. 2024. Springtime bird use of agricultural landscapes examined by using autonomous recording units. \*Journal of Field Ornithology\* 95:1.](#)

[Singer, D., et al. 2024. Aggregated time-series features boost species-specific differentiation of true and false positives in passive acoustic monitoring of bird assemblages. Remote Sensing in Ecology and Conservation \(early online version\).](#)

[Gautschi, D., A. Culina, R. Heinsohn, D. Stojanovic, and R. Crates. 2024. Protecting wild bird nests against predators: A systematic review and meta-analysis of non-lethal methods. Journal of Applied Ecology \(early online version\).](#)

### **Trivia Answer**

Daniel Kahneman, in his 2011 best-selling book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Dr. Kahneman and his frequent research partner Amos Tversky are often credited with inventing the field of behavioral economics, which revealed the fallacy of the classic economic assumption that people can be relied upon to make reason-based decisions. Despite ([or maybe because of](#)) being a psychologist and not an economist, he received the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2002. Dr. Kahneman died last month at the age of 90.

If you think the decisions people (including landowners, hunters, and biologists) make can be explained or predicted using rational cost-benefit analyses, you might give *Thinking, Fast and Slow* a look. At 500 pages it's not a breezy read, but there is almost certainly something you'll come across that will challenge your perceptions of human behavior (including, most importantly, your own).

*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>.*