

Pheasant News and Notes

February 2024



Trivia Question

True or false: As of 2022, more U.S. hunters pursued small game (upland game birds, rabbits, and/or squirrels) than migratory birds (waterfowl, woodcock, doves, etc.).

USDA and Legislative News

Thanks to Andrew Schmidt (Government Affairs Director, Pheasants Forever) for providing the following monthly recap and update:

Once again, Congress has reached an agreement to avoid a government shutdown and extend government funding to allow more time to pass appropriations bills for the remainder of FY2024. This extension provides funding for some agencies (including USDA) through March 1st, with the remainder funded through March 8th. As with before, Congress will need to work quickly in the new year to enact full appropriations bills or another CR before those dates to keep the government operational.

House Ag Committee Chairman GT Thompson (R-PA) had indicated that he wanted to move a Farm Bill in March, but that plan could be in jeopardy with the ongoing battles over FY2024 appropriations. With a limited number of legislative days left until campaign season really picks up, House and Senate Ag Committee leaders do not have much time to reach agreement and secure passage of a full Farm Bill before the summer, when political conventions and campaigning will take much of the attention away from Washington, DC.

While Congress continues work on the next five-year bill, USDA announced that CRP [would reopen continuous signup](#) on January 12th, allowing landowners and producers to enroll environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices. Announcements on General CRP and Grassland CRP signups are expected soon. Enrollment in CRP now stands at nearly 25 million acres – the most acres enrolled since the 2014 Farm Bill was signed into law. Just in the last three years, we have seen an increase of 5 million acres in the program. With very few acres expiring later this year, we expect to be even closer to the 27-million-acre cap this fall. It will be critically important that we carry this momentum forward into this next year as work continues on a new Farm Bill.

Elsewhere, Todd Bogenschutz (Technical Committee, Iowa) forwarded a link to the USDA's public [Land Use and Cover Inventory Database \(LUCID\)](#) for those wanting to track state- and/or county-specific land cover changes during 1982-2017. The tool can also provide erosion estimates by land cover type. Data are from the agency's [Natural Resources Inventory \(NRI\)](#) program.

Kenneth Elgersma and coauthors recently published [an interesting study](#) on the effects of mid-contract management (MCM) on vegetation characteristics of CRP fields in the western and central U.S. They found MCM tended to increase the coverage of flowering forbs without changing overall vegetation coverage much (i.e., not much bare ground persisted after treatment). Grazing and haying had different

effects than mowing or disking regarding noxious weed responses, and burning and disking were the least used MCM practices observed. If anyone wants a copy of the whole paper, drop me a note.

U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow (MI), chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, was [recently honored](#) with the Conservation Champion Award at Pheasants Forever's 2024 Michigan State Convention. The award recognizes Stabenow's decades of service to conservation, and her tremendous success in advocating for the natural world in her home state and across the nation. "Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever have been such fantastic partners with me in passing historic conservation initiatives that will impact generations to come," Stabenow said. "Michigan's wildlife and natural resources are part of our DNA, which makes this honor especially meaningful to me." Thanks to Jim Inglis (Management Board, Pheasants Forever) for traveling to Lansing to present the award.



Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

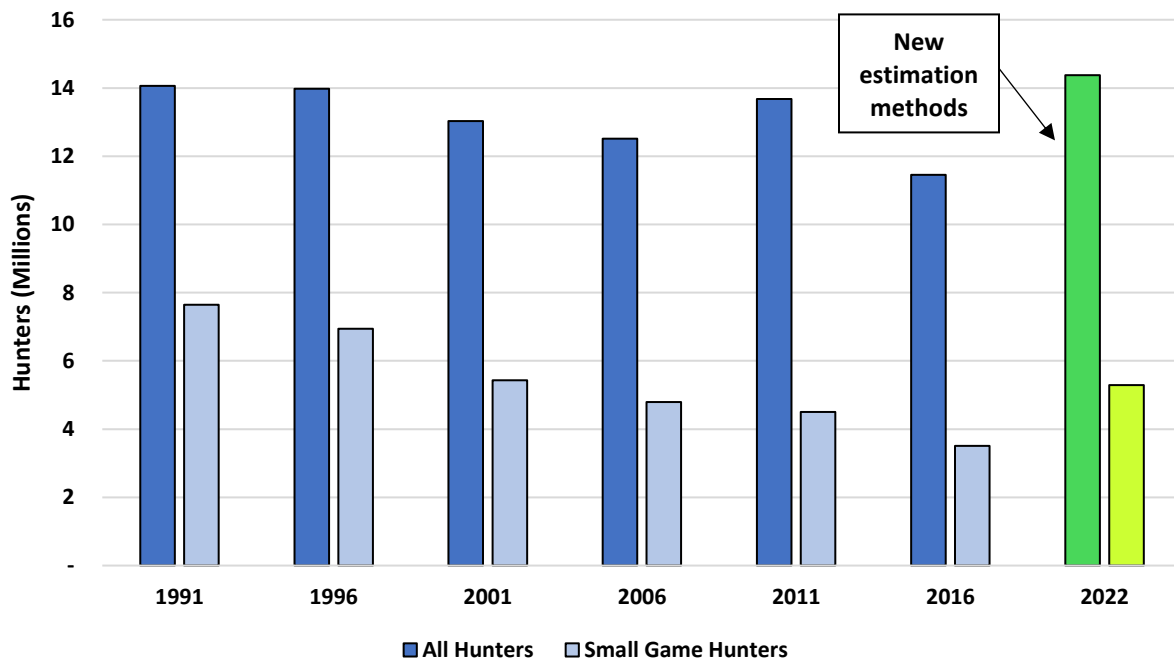
Results of the [2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation](#) are now available online. The survey was produced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is conducted every five years (the latest version was due in 2021 but was delayed a year due to the pandemic).

The survey estimated 14.4 million U.S. hunters in 2022, 5.3 million (37%) of which hunted small game (upland game birds, squirrels, and rabbits). This is lower than the percentage pursuing big game (80%), but higher than that for migratory birds (20%) or other animals (16%). In total, hunters spent an estimated \$45 billion, or an average of \$3,146 each, on hunting-related trips, equipment, and services during the survey year, which was higher than that reported per participant for fishing (\$2,490) or wildlife-watching (\$1,687). Of the 259 million people in the U.S. at least 16 years old and older, about 6% reported hunting, compared with 15 and 57% participating in fishing and wildlife-watching, respectively.

Although those who lived in rural settings are three times more likely to hunt than urban dwellers (4 vs. 12% participation rates), over half (52%) of adult hunters lived in metropolitan areas with at least 250,000 residents. Asian Americans had higher participation rates in hunting (7%), fishing (20%), and wildlife-watching (65%) than any other racial category, although they comprised no more than 6% of the total U.S. participants in those activities. Only 2% of adult females were hunters, compared with 10 and 54% who were anglers or wildlife-watchers, respectively.

The 2016 National Survey estimated 3.5 million small game hunters, so the 2022 figure of 5.3 million would seem to be cause for celebration. But there's a catch – the survey methods changed this year, and the authors make it clear that the new figures are not comparable to those in previous surveys. So is the apparent increase (see figure below) due to a so-called "Covid bump" or is it a methodological

mirage? Your guess is as good as mine, though state license sales data could help figure things out for some.



Not only are the national results not comparable to previous surveys, but this year’s version asked fewer questions and thus produced less detailed results. For example, previous surveys asked about activity and expenditures associated with individual small game species (like pheasants) or species groups (like “quail”), so we could extract participation and spending data for those specific hunters. This is no longer possible with the shortened survey questionnaire.

The survey was shortened to reduce USFWS costs and the time burden for respondents, which are both worthy goals. However, this leaves us without even a semi-regular national estimate of pheasant hunters (let alone expenditures), as some states no longer generate their own hunter numbers. If these national estimates are important to us, we’ll have to figure out another way of calculating them.

In related human dimensions news, Nicholas Cole and his coauthors recently published [the results of a national survey](#) designed to shed light on the most common barriers to participation in hunting and birdwatching. Not surprisingly, respondents were almost four times more likely to perceive some sort of constraint to participating in hunting than in birdwatching, particularly for females.

A case study in overcoming those constraints is detailed by Margie Crisp in her new book, *Duck Walk: A Birder’s Improbable Path to Hunting as Conservation*. I haven’t read it, but our friend Jim Gammonley with Colorado Parks and Wildlife wrote a [favorable review of the book](#) for Ornithological Applications.

Many of our readers are gearing up to attend [Pheasant Fest](#) in Sioux Falls at the end of the month – hats off to all those planning and working at the event. Among all the great features is a technical session on Saturday morning, including presentations by James Martin (“Why is Upland Game Bird Conservation So Hard? Yet, So Great?”), Dwayne Elmore (“Scaled Quail Habitat Selection and Survival With Implications

For Managers”), Grant Ravery (“New Tools For Managing Pheasant Habitat Connectivity”), and myself (“Toward a Return-on-Investment Approach to Pheasant Management”). An afternoon session is being planned around topics related to the Working Lands for Wildlife Program, and a student poster session will be running throughout the day around both sets of talks. Thanks to Jess McGuire and Andy Edwards for putting the event together. Hope to see you there!

Finally, I mentioned an RFP opportunity last month regarding completion of a comprehensive literature review of the Conservation Reserve Program. There have been some edits made to the legalese associated with the RFP, which resulted in a [new posting under a different web address](#). If anyone forwarded the original RFP link (which no longer works) last month, please forward the new information to those same recipients. The deadline for submissions is still March 1st. Thanks!

Pheasant-relevant Media

[Good pheasant hunting in '23 likely to provide solid data for North Dakota](#)

[State lacks data to prove trapping program increases South Dakota pheasant population, official says](#)

[New pheasant hunting season could be on the way for sportsmen in Pennsylvania](#)

[Kentucky lawmaker wants to drop penalties for killing hawks. Conservation groups not happy](#)

[What it takes for a sustainable wild pheasant population](#)

[Pheasant for dinner](#)

[How much of the world is it possible to model?](#)

[Dropping \(eponymous bird\) names](#)

[2023 Land Report: Who owns the most land in the United States?](#)

Recent Literature

[Jorgensen, A. V., C. D. Isaacson, J. L. Kolar, and S. N. Ellis-Felege. 2023. The mixing pot: Observations of hybridization between sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie-chickens in North Dakota. *Prairie Naturalist* 55:152-160.](#)

[Roy, C. L., J. Giudice, and L. M. Shartell. 2024. Sharp-tailed Grouse increase site use after prescribed fire but not mechanical treatments during the fall. *Avian Conservation and Ecology* 19\(1\):1.](#)

[Elgersma, K. J., M. Vandever, and A. Wen. 2023. Mid-contract management alters Conservation Reserve Program vegetation in the central and western United States. *Ecological Restoration* 41:169-179.](#)

[Berigan, L. A., et al. 2024. Lesser prairie-chicken dispersal after translocation: Implications for restoration and population connectivity. *Ecology and Evolution* 14:e10871.](#)

[Powell, M. A., S. A. Brown, R. M. Rotman, and S. A. Wilhelm Stanis. 2024. Supplement to conservation easements, not replacement, is the appropriate role of habitat leasing. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* \(early online version\).](#)

[Banuelos, M. J., M. Moran-Luis, P. Mirol, and M. Quevedo. 2024. Tracking movements in an endangered capercaillie population using DNA tagging. *Wildlife Biology* \(early online version\).](#)

[Cole, N. W., et al. 2024. Perceived constraints to participating in wildlife-related recreation. Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism 45:100712.](#)

[Jones, M. S. 2024. Integrating the human dimensions into fish and wildlife management depends on increasing managers' social science fluency. Human Dimensions of Wildlife \(early online version\).](#)

Trivia Answer

True, and by a wide margin. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, among people 16 years old and older, there were about 5.3 million small game hunters and 2.8 million migratory bird hunters in 2022. People who hunted both types of game were included in both totals.

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>.