Pheasant News and Notes

April 2026

Trivia Question

Can a pheasant run without feet? (And no, this isn't a late April Fool's Day joke.)

USDA and Legislative News

The content below was submitted by Andrew Schmidt, Government Affairs Director for Pheasants Forever. Thanks, Andrew!

CRP signup ongoing, new Continuous batching period announced

FY2026 CRP signups continue to roll on, with the General signup open through April 17. Grassland CRP signup dates have yet to be announced but are expected to happen later this spring/early summer. Recall last year, the Grassland signup was not announced until July 14, three months after the initial announcements for General and Continuous signups. The first Continuous signup batching period ended March 20. No information has been shared publicly on status of the ongoing signups, however just this week, FSA published a notice providing notification of a second batching period for the Continuous signup through May 1.

Farm Bill (non)update

Following the House Ag Committee markup the first week of March, there has been little public movement on enacting a 2026 Farm Bill, despite President Trump's call for passing the bill. You can find more analysis of the House Ag Committee's markup and the bill advanced out of committee on PF's blog here. The House bill is still awaiting action on the floor, in part due to thin vote margins and limited floor time but also thanks to the emergence of greyhounds as a political lightning rod. In the Senate, the timeline for bill text and a markup is still unclear. While there have been some recent reports that Chairman Boozman wants to mark up a farm bill this spring, he and Ranking Member Klobuchar remain at odds over changes to SNAP enacted in last year's reconciliation bill, jeopardizing the ability to release a bipartisan bill.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

April marks the start of pheasant crow count surveys in several states, and our partnership's collection of additional crow counts to help test the accuracy of the abundance prediction models in development at Ohio State University is also getting underway. At this point it looks like California, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, and Washington will

contribute validation counts via in-person or automated recording unit data, or both. Thanks to everyone involved in this effort, including the four states (Kansas, North Dakota, Ohio, and Wisconsin) who contributed their historic crow counts as training data for the models. A brief description of the project is available here.

On a related note, Allison Barg defended her dissertation at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln last month. Her project involved developing models to predict pheasant abundance in Nebraska, then using those models to identify land parcels whose conversion from grassland to cropland (or vice versa) would have the largest impact on pheasant numbers. You can watch her presentation here.

Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever recently made their Habitat University resources available to the public for free. The platform provides a variety of land management-oriented training materials developed by PF&QF and their partners, with funding provided by USDA and USFWS. If your organization would like to add a course to the platform or has suggestions for additional topics, let me know and I can put you in touch with the program administrators.

Also, I updated our "Primary Ring-necked Pheasant Literature" document last month. The updated version is available on the National Plan website.

Finally, I attended the 91st North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Columbus, Ohio last week, and it was good to see several Management Board and Technical Committee members there, as well. There's no way to cover everything that is communicated at the conference, but below are my notes from the sessions I attended:

- National Bobwhite and Grassland Initiative Management Board meeting
    - The partnership just celebrated their 30th anniversary. Some partners in the room said they appreciated having a vehicle to pursue longer-term multi-state efforts, noting that it took 8 years to deliver the CP-33 practice (quail buffers) within CRP.
    - One of those long-term efforts is their work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to stand up a new Collaborative Conservation Initiative (CCI) option, which allows multiple states to contribute federal aid dollars to a qualifying partnership. NBGI's operational CCI will likely be up and running by July 1st, and their implementation CCI (funding their habitat management service center) likely won't be ready until 2027.
    - NBCI's draft strategic plan update should be distributed to their Management Board and Technical Committee later this summer.
    - Cody Rhoden was recently hired as NBGI's Habitat Implementation Coordinator. Cody was Small Game Coordinator for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources and served as a NBGI Technical Committee member.

    - Shaun Oldenburger (Management Board, Texas) reported that TPWD has recently started a rigorous eyeworm/bobwhite ecology study, with James Martin of the University of Georgia as the principal investigator.
- Bird Conservation Committee meeting
    - The Partners in Flight (PIF) Science Committee currently has over 10 manuscripts in review for a Special Feature in *Avian Conservation and Ecology* featuring the committee's migratory bird conservation tools and applications. The Special Feature's opening essay was published in late January 2026 and outlines PIF's history, broad direct and indirect impacts, and PIF Science's call to action to come together across the bird conservation community.
    - The Avian Knowledge Network is a repository of bird data supported by the Department of War and other partners. Current collaborators include the National Wild Turkey Federation to house multi-state turkey brood survey data. AKN currently does not yet offer support for automated recording unit data but is working on providing that service.
    - Communication towers kill 6-7 million birds per year. Mortalities can be significantly reduced by converting steady burn lights to flashing lights, which also saves money.
    - The USGS reported that North American Breeding Bird Survey data through 2025 will be released sometime this month. They also plan to release a spatial data set (routes lines and/or approximate survey points) in late summer. USGS is also maintaining a spatial tool depicting avian influenza occurrences.
- Private Lands Working Group meeting
    - Due to a position vacancy, the Agriculture Conservation Committee and its working groups (including this one) currently lack an AFWA staff liaison. Jenny Prenosil (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission) has continued to perform some of that position's duties in the interim – thanks to Jenny and NGPC for donating their time and effort.
    - This group continues to work on issues surrounding training needs for early career private lands biologists, maintaining a spreadsheet of 113 potential training topics or skills deemed important. The Missouri Department of Conservation is using this list to develop benchmarks for their staff. They expect new employees to attain Conservation Planner I certification in their first 2-3 years.
    - Relatedly, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and the Arkansas Wildlife Federation developed a Private Lands Leadership Academy, which trains a cohort of about 20 students through multiple in-person and virtual engagements over a 9-month course. Participant cost is about $2,000 per student.
    - Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever announced their Habitat University coursework portal is now publicly available. Program and course descriptions are available here.
- EQIP/CSP Working Group meeting
    - NRCS has recently undertaken the goal of simplifying these programs by reducing the number of practice scenario options available under EQIP. In some cases, this has meant combining wildlife-specific scenarios with similar but separate scenarios related to production agriculture-related activities. States reported that this will reduce the wildlife benefits delivered by these simplified combinations of practices due to some specific management options no longer being available.
    - NRCS announced a Regenerative Pilot Program last December, offering $700 million in EQIP and CSP funds to address "whole-farm resource concerns through support for voluntary regenerative agriculture conservation plans." The group wondered if we

could expect any wildlife benefits to flow from this initiative; Nebraska indicated some benefits might be gained by a cover crop project in their state.

- RCPP Working Group meeting
    - NRCS advised that they expect a new Notice of Funding Opportunity for new applications is expected by the end of the summer
    - The NRCS lead on the program asked grant holders to pay more attention to good project management discipline, including reporting of relevant outcomes. She suggested using things like Google Smart Sheets and other AI-supported tools to quickly summarize work activities and spending. She also said it was important to monitor outcomes, including baseline conditions to allow before-and-after comparisons. They are not looking for graduate-level projects to monitor outcomes, but they need answers to questions like how many producers will be served by the project, and what USDA is getting for their money.
- CRP Working Group meeting
    - Jess McGuire (Director of Applied Science, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever) led a presentation on the various projects currently being funded by FSA's CRP Monitoring, Assessment, and Evaluation grant program. These include our National Pheasant Plan partnership's pheasant abundance prediction modeling project with Ohio State University, and evaluation of CP-38 enrollment benefits for bobwhites, and an online tool to locate and explore publications related to the Conservation Reserve Program.
    - Some states reported that lack of staff in USDA county offices is hampering promotion and communication regarding the current CRP signup offerings.
- Resident Game Bird Working Group meeting
    - Chair Mike Reynolds (Management Board, Ohio) is this group's representative to the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). Many NABCI members mobilized last year to successfully oppose the proposed disposal of public lands, and there is a desire to keep this informal coalition of bird groups and others together to more quickly meet future challenges. However, some bird groups at times are uncomfortable partnering with hunting-oriented stakeholders, so there may be a role for traditional "hook-and-bullet" bird-focused groups to help facilitate these relationships.
    - The Eastern Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan is now available online. The partnership that wrote it is planning to apply for a multistate grant to fund a habitat connectivity and abundance assessment, which would include resources to hire a plan coordinator to oversee the production of those items.
    - Kent Fricke (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission) reported that an updated version of a lesser prairie-chicken conservation plan is due in June of 2027. It is hoped that this will be more of a state-led document that will remain durable to whatever federal listing status the species finds itself in.
    - Jim Inglis (Policy Director, North American Grouse Partnership) reported that NAGP is making progress with their Lesser Prairie-Chicken Landowner Alliance program. The Alliance currently has about 16 ranchers participating, with a programmatic goal of securing ten, 200,000-acre "Ranching Strongholds" managed to help reverse the species' decline.
    - The National Wild Turkey Federation reported that Dr. Patrick Wightman was recently named their national director of wild turkey research and science. This new position is in addition to the two endowed chairs they support at the University of Georgia and Mississippi State University.

- Bradley Wilkinson (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' liaison for the Bird Conservation Committee and its working groups) reported that he is in the process of using artificial intelligence tools to identify the commonalities among the myriad North American bird plans, including their shared themes and recommendations. He will share his findings with the group.
- Jess McGuire (Applied Science Director, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever) reported that she is now the Vice Chair (Americas) of the IUCN Galliformes Specialist Group, and can serve as a liaison between that group and ours. Check out their website for lots of interesting resources.

Pheasant-relevant Media

Policy update: House Ag Committee advances 2026 Farm Bill proposal
Did animal activists sneak a hunting ban into the farm bill?
Can Congress pass a new Farm Bill in 2026?
Conservation funding and soil health programs in North American agriculture
Conservation is at a crossroads with the new Farm Bill
Iowa's ag secretary sees 'multiple wins' in updating Conservation Reserve Program
Audubon to expand rancher-powered conservation for birds across 500,000 acres
These animals can cause big trouble. Why are states unleashing them by the millions?
Do state birds have a leg up in conservation?
The martyrs, hunters, and nature lovers who came together to save birds

Recent Literature

Fuller, K. B., et al. 2026. Status and trends of USDA conservation programs, 2002-2025. USDA Economic Research Service, Economic Brief 49.

Cramer, A. S., et al. 2026. Estimating crippling loss from hunting with multistate models: a case study on northern bobwhites. Wildlife Biology (early online version).

Suber, H. N., et al. 2026. Pharmacokinetics of fenbendazole and its bioactive metabolite oxfendazole in northern bobwhite administered an anthelmintic feed. International Journal for Parasitology: Drugs and Drug Resistance 30:100640.

Olsoy, P. J., et al. 2026. Extensive use of agricultural and conservation fields by male greater sage-grouse. Rangeland Ecology and Management 106:70-77.

Milligan, M. C., et al. 2026. Changes in spatial distribution and abundance together determine potential for population persistence for greater sage-grouse. Diversity and Distributions 32:e70092.

Owens, T. M., et al. 2026. Additive and interactive effects of wildfire and *Corvus corax* (Common Raven) density on *Centrocercus urophasianus* (Greater Sage-Grouse) nest site selection and survival. Ornithological Applications (early online version).

Berry, L. L., et al. 2026. Finding the (small) cores: Spatial covariance tracks grassland bird community occupancy in fragmented grasslands. Ecosphere 17:e70515.

Ebrahimi, S., et al. 2026. Toward sustainable land use: exploratory spatial analysis of Conservation Reserve Program participation in the U.S. Midwest. Sustainability 18:3567.

Rhinehart, T. A., et al. 2026. Addressing widespread detection heterogeneity in avian occupancy modeling using passive acoustic surveys. Ornithological Applications (early online version).

Sugai, L. S. M., et al. 2026. Acoustic indices are not useful for biodiversity research. Methods in Ecology and Evolution (early online version).

Trivia Answer

Apparently so. In 1957, W. G. Leitch and Bob McCabe wrote in the *Journal of Wildlife Management*, "Amputation of one leg is of uncommon but regular incidence among hen pheasants in the Lake States, the phenomenon being generally attributable to contact with hay-mowing machinery. On October 28, 1946 a hen with both legs mutilated (Fig. 2) was shot (illegally) on a public hunting ground in Wisconsin. According to N. R. Barger (pers. comm.), a cock with both legs amputated was shot in 1956 in Winnebago County in the same state. Despite this handicap, the bird was reported to be a fast runner." Tough birds!

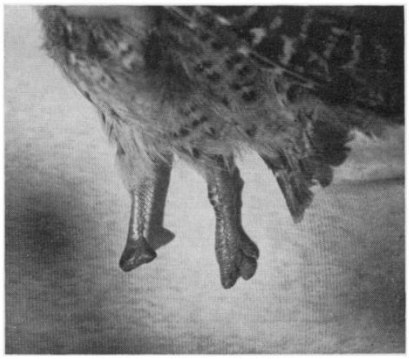

FIG. 2. Recovery from leg amputation by a pheasant.

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.