Pheasant News and Notes

March 2026

Trivia Question

According to former Wisconsin biologist John Gates, how often do pheasant roosters crow in the spring around sunrise: A) once per minute, B) once every two minutes, or C) once every three minutes?

USDA and Legislative News

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

CRP signup announcement

On February 10, USDA announced the enrollment periods for both the Continuous and General CRP signups. The Continuous signup opened on February 12, with the first batching period ending on March 20. FSA has indicated that if acres remain available, offers submitted after this date will be considered for acceptance in subsequent batching periods. The General signup will run March 9 through April 17. Dates for the Grassland CRP signup will be announced in the near future. Notably, FSA did not make any significant changes to signup rules, rental rates, or incentive payments. See PF's press release here.

House Ag Committee farm bill markup

Early last Thursday morning, following a 22+ hour markup over two days, the House Agriculture Committee voted to advance the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 with a vote of 34-17, with seven Democrats voting with all Republicans. This "farm bill 2.0" follows last year's reconciliation bill, which significantly increased baseline funding for EQIP, CSP, ACEP, and RCPP, and provided $70 million for VPA-HIP. This bill, however, was required to be budget neutral due to House rules, meaning no new funding was provided for conservation (or other) programs.

This notably had an impact on what could be done on the Conservation Reserve Program. As a result, CRP was given a straight reauthorization through 2031, maintaining existing acreage caps, rental rates, and other provisions. Because of these budgetary limitations, we were unable to include PF's priorities for improving cost-share, payment limits, and rental rates, and we also successfully defended against other provisions that could have had a negative effect on CRP.

Although the bill itself did not do much on CRP, multiple amendments to the program were offered and discussed during the markup. Reps. Costa (D-CA), Johnson (R-SD), Feenstra (R-IA), and Davids (D-KS) co-sponsored an amendment to include the provisions of the PF & QF-endorsed CRP Improvement and Flexibility Act. While the amendment was withdrawn given the cost associated with the provisions, all four members spoke in support of the amendment and secured a commitment from Chairman Thompson to work with the Senate to include these provisions in the final farm bill (see the markup livestream here around 4:18:00) for the discussion.

Immediately after that amendment, Rep. Finstad (R-MN) offered and withdraw an amendment to include the entire CRP section from the 2024 farm bill that passed out of the same committee. Recall that bill made a number of significant changes to CRP, including rental rates, eligibility, and signup types.

Those provisions were estimated by the Congressional Budget Office to score $1.8 billion over 10 years and consequently were not included in this year's legislation.

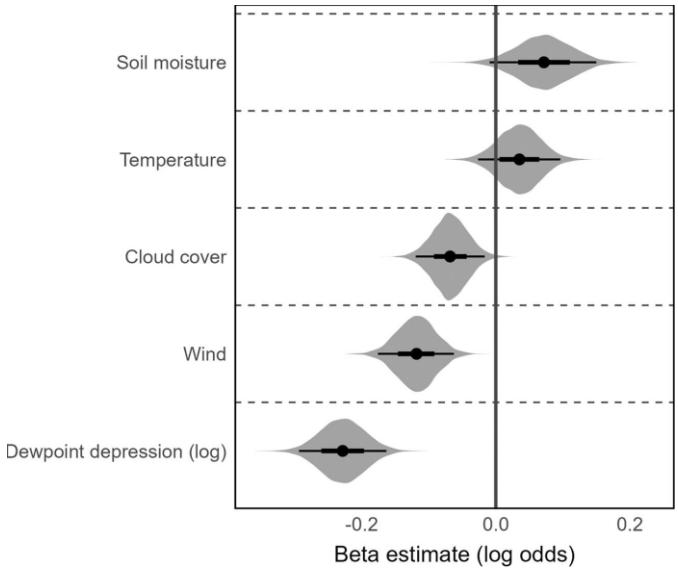
One amendment that was successfully included in the bill was from Rep. Vasquez (D-NM) to allow the "stacking" of EQIP cost-share on Grassland CRP contracts for the purpose of improving and enhancing wildlife habitat and connectivity.

A more detailed analysis of what was in the bill will be posted to Pheasants Forever's website in the coming days. There have been also recent reports of the Senate Ag Committee looking to mark up their own farm bill later this spring. This hasn't been formally confirmed by committee yet, but we will of course be working closely with committee staff and member offices to ensure PF & QF priorities are reflected.

Please reach out to me (aschmidt@pheasantsforever.org) with any questions.

Notes from Around the Pheasant Range

Results of our multi-state brood survey study have now been published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management*. Several states have long used summer roadside surveys to help monitor population status and predict fall hunting prospects, and the study confirmed the importance of environmental factors in the detection of broods, with dewpoint depression (i.e., the opposite of the probability of dew) and wind having the greatest effects. Most importantly, states can use the final model quantifying these effects to create an average quality "score" for the routes run in a particular year, which can be compared to scores for the previous year or their long-term averages (a web-based tool is in development to calculate scores). These comparisons can then provide important context when writing hunting forecasts and interpreting trends.



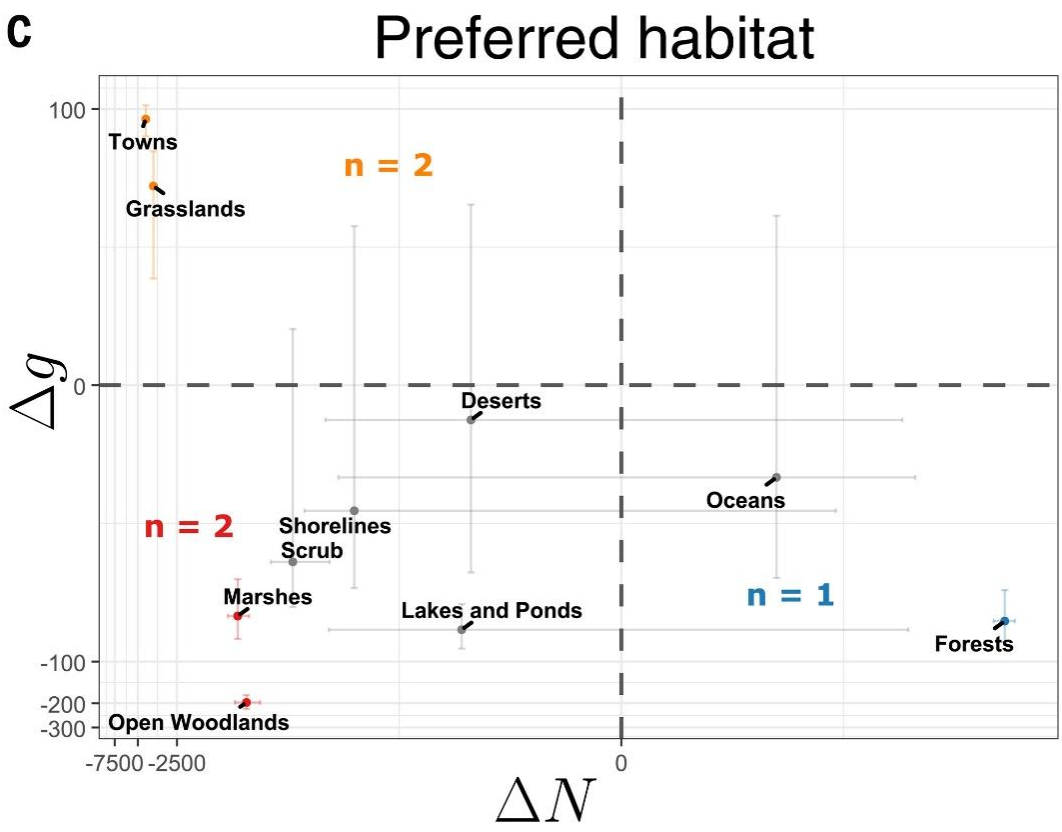
The acknowledgment section of the paper deserves to be repeated in full: "*Funding for this project was provided by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management at Iowa State University. Travis Runia, Nicholai O' Hara, Kyle Kaskie, Jeff Prendergast, John Laux, Sarah Garrison, Joseph Lautenbach, RJ Gross, Tell Judkins, Casey Cardinal, Jeff Knetter, Dave Hoover, Beth Emmerich, Jana Livingston, Tim Lyons, Sierra Robatcek, Alan Stewart, and Mark Wiley assisted with coordination, data acquisition, and logistical support of this research. We would also like to thank all those who assisted with surveys for their willingness to wake up early in the morning to count pheasants, northern bobwhite, and other*

upland game bird species across the country to support this project. Two anonymous reviewers made suggestions that improved the presentation and interpretation of the final manuscript."

I believe this represents the first truly multi-state research effort in several decades to answer a specific pheasant management question originating from the states themselves. Well done, everyone!

That project greased the wheels for our next one, which is developing pheasant abundance prediction models based on multi-scale habitat and environmental variables. Almost a dozen states have expressed a willingness to collect pheasant crow count data to help verify the accuracy of these models, which are in development at Ohio State University with funding from USDA-FSA and Pheasants Forever. Those crow counts start next month, and I have been working with the Technical Committee to finalize field protocols and assign equipment. I'm looking forward to the first verification data hitting our hard drives soon!

Jess McGuire (Director of Applied Science, PF&QF) passed along a new article in *Science* suggesting a general decline in North American bird populations from 1987 to 2021, and an accelerating decline in areas associated with agricultural intensity. I haven't been able to extract the authors' key metrics (population trend and rate of change) for pheasants from their supplementary information, but as a group, grassland birds show a decelerating decline. Analyses were based on route-level counts from the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Thanks, Jess!



The 2026 Pheasant Fest and Quail Classic was held last month in Minneapolis and was another great success, drawing nearly 30,000 attendees. If you are a fan of pheasants and other upland wildlife,

habitat restoration, conservation-minded policy and education, bird dogs, and/or hunting in general, there was plenty to keep you busy at this event. If you haven't seen it, you should! Next year's event will be in Omaha, Nebraska on March 5-7, 2027.

One of the media articles I linked to last month described some legislation in Michigan that purportedly removed a sunset clause related to pheasant hunting in the state. As it turns out, the media report wasn't quite right. As Adam Bump (Technical Committee, Michigan) explained, "We have a regular 'wild bird' pheasant season that was never at risk. However, our small pheasant release program has a standalone license (required by anyone hunting public lands or HAP lands in the Lower Peninsula). The $25 license that funds the release program was established in statute with a 5-year sunset. The bill that passed simply repealed the sunset, making the $25 license, and thus the pheasant release program, permanent. Had this piece of statute expired, we still would have had our regular pheasant season." So wild pheasant hunting was never at risk of "expiring" in the state of Michigan – go to know!

Pheasant-relevant Media

Now would seem like a good time to think seriously about the CRP
National Pheasant Fest & Quail Classic 2026 draws 28,852 attendees
Classrooms join forces with Pheasants Forever to create habitats for wildlife
Hotspots of accelerated North American bird decline linked to agricultural activity
March and even into April the true test of winter survival for deer, pheasants
Unveiling East Coast pheasant hunts: a hunter's paradise
Pheasants to be culled in UK bird flu outbreak
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition: At a crossroads, House farm bill falls unmistakably short
'Birdbrain' benefits: How being an expert birdwatcher may boost cognition
Interior scales back environmental regulations for public lands
Trump administration ends protections for rare dancing prairie bird

Recent Literature

Janke, A. K., Z. R. Deines, J. S. Taylor, P. M. Dixon, and T. Bogenschutz. 2026. Environmental factors influencing detection of ring-necked pheasant broods during August roadside surveys. Journal of Wildlife Management (early online version).

Leroy, F., M. A. Jarzyna, and P. Keil. 2026. Acceleration hotspots of North American birds' decline are associated with agriculture. Science 391:917-921.

Madden, J. R., et al. 2026. An evaluation of the distance at which direct ecological effects of released pheasants extend beyond their release sites. Ecology and Evolution 16:e73170.

Bloodworth, K. J., et al. 2026. Fire frequency drives tradeoffs among conservation priorities in tallgrass prairie. Fire Ecology (early online version).

Coppess, J. 2026. Now would seem like a good time to think seriously about the CRP. farmdoc daily (16):32, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, February 26, 2026.

Wibbenmeyer, M., Y. Liao, H. Druckenmiller, and R. Iovanna. 2026. The impact of the Conservation Reserve Program on nearby property values. Resources for the Future Working Paper 26-02.

Jackson, H. N., L. Redmore, C. A. Cheek, and J. Z. Cheek. 2026. To hunt or not to hunt: Is it that simple for female hunters? Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism 53:101012.

Trivia Answer

According to Gates, Wisconsin pheasants in the early 1960s crowed about once every two minutes, but it varied by population density. On average, birds crowed every 111, 133, and 157 seconds in high, medium, and low density areas, respectively.

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.