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2015 MINNESOTA PHEASANT SUMMIT ACTION PLAN



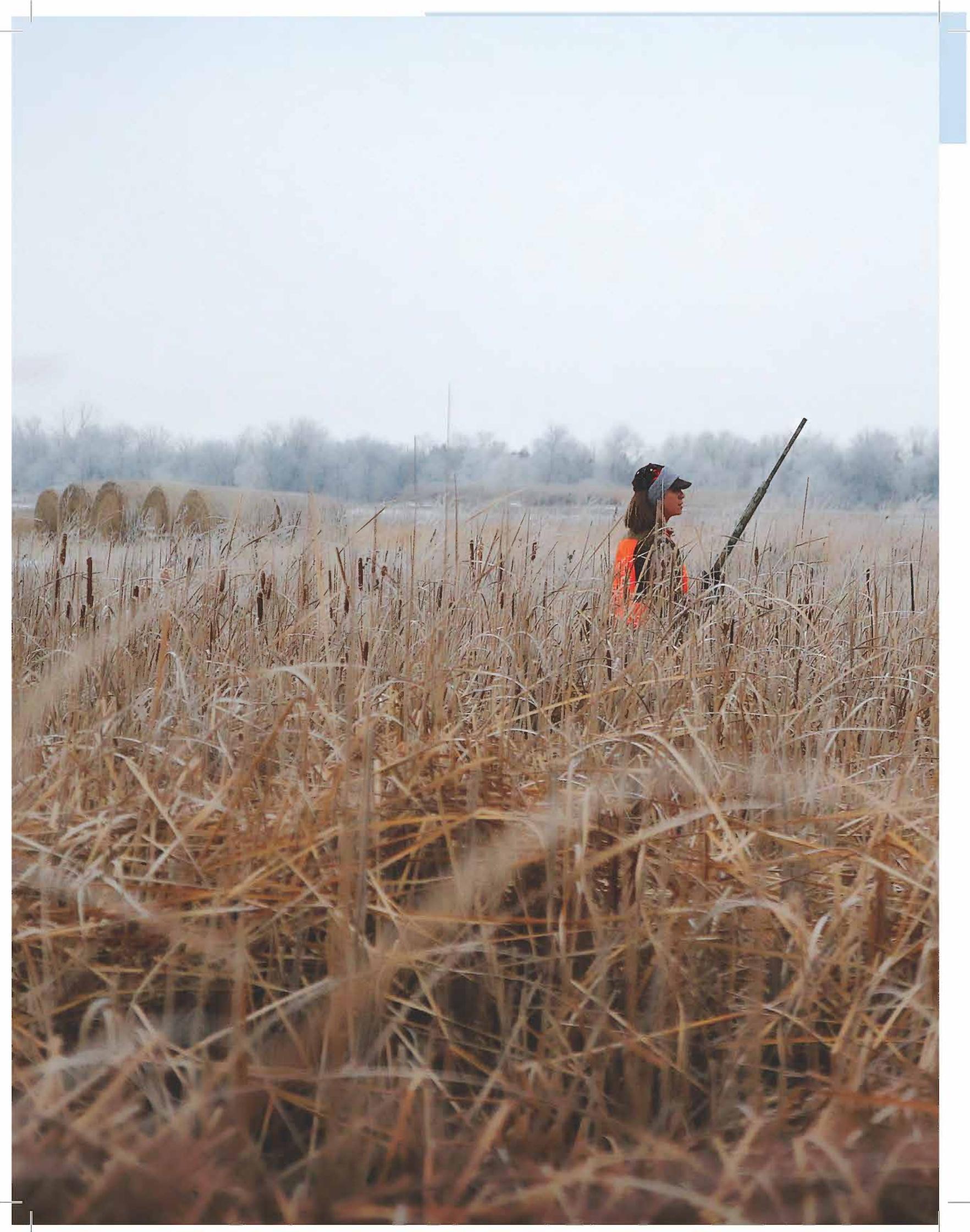


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Letter from the Agencies

Pheasant hunting is a long-standing Minnesota tradition. At one time, one out of every twelve Minnesotans hunted pheasants. Unfortunately, since 1961 when 270,000 Minnesotans hunted pheasants, this tradition has been experienced by fewer and fewer Minnesotans. In 2014 there were fewer than 58,000 pheasant hunters participating in the sport.

Not surprisingly, this decline in hunter participation reflects a decline in pheasant habitat and in the birds themselves. Much good work has been done to counter these trends – from the promotion and adoption of voluntary conservation programs in agricultural areas, development of state and federal public hunting land programs, the founding of an organization dedicated to pheasants, the passing of the Legacy Amendment in 2008, to the development of a statewide pheasant plan. These efforts, however, have not been fast enough or extensive enough to stem the precipitous decline in recent decades in pheasants, other grassland birds such as meadowlarks, as well as monarch butterflies and other pollinators. The loss of grassland habitat on the landscape has also been tied to water quality and other environmental issues across the pheasant range of the state.

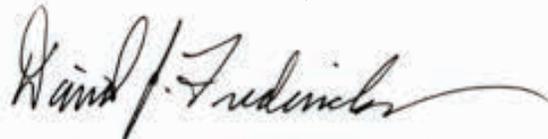
In 2014 Governor Mark Dayton displayed bold leadership and injected new energy into pheasant conservation efforts when he convened a Pheasant Summit in Marshall, MN. His challenge was clear – to develop an action plan that would restore Minnesota’s pheasant populations and its pheasant hunting tradition.

The Pheasant Summit Action Plan is a major step forward, turning goals identified by Summit attendees into action. The actions described in this plan capture those immediate and achievable steps that will make the greatest difference in improving pheasant habitat and hunting opportunities. A key component of this plan is the development of an annual “report card,” which agencies and stakeholders we will review each year to measure and track progress over time.

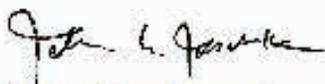
As agency leaders, we are committed to working collaboratively across the Executive Branch and with the Legislature to accomplish these actions. We also know that public engagement is key to the success of this plan. We greatly appreciate the work of the attendees of the Pheasant Summit and the Pheasant Summit Steering Committee and look forward to working with farmers, landowners, communities, and conservation and other organizations to make this plan a reality.



Tom Landwehr, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



Dave Frederickson, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Agriculture



John Jaschke, Director
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources



“For almost 60 years, I have enjoyed pheasant hunting in Minnesota. But the decisions we make today will determine whether future generations of Minnesotans will have those same opportunities. I look forward to convening this Minnesota Pheasant Summit, and developing strategies to improve the pheasant population in our state.”

—Governor Mark Dayton, September 26, 2014

Introduction

On December 13, 2014, Gov. Mark Dayton convened a Pheasant Summit in Marshall. Attendees included the governor; the commissioners of the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Agriculture; elected officials and their representatives; staff from multiple federal and state agencies; and 250 hunters, conservationists, farmers and ranchers. It was Gov. Dayton’s desire that this group, representing a diversity of interests in Minnesota, help forge a plan to restore pheasant populations in the state and ensure that future generations can participate in Minnesota’s rich pheasant hunting tradition.

Summit attendees viewed presentations on historical pheasant habitat and population summaries. They also were presented with the results of an online survey of 750 Minnesotans, which solicited suggestions on restoring pheasant habitat and populations and enhancing hunting

opportunity. With that information in hand, summit attendees brainstormed and developed action items. A Pheasant Summit Steering Committee, comprised of leaders from agricultural and conservation groups, refined those action items and provided input into the plan.

This resultant Pheasant Summit Action Plan presents those ideas and establishes an aggressive set of short- and long-term steps to increase and improve habitat for pheasants and opportunities for hunting. This action plan includes measurable goals for a four-year time frame, recognizing that habitat conservation will need to continue far into the future.

A state pheasant plan completed in 2005 focused primarily on statewide goals for acres to be protected and restored. This 2015 action plan identifies the specific steps to accomplish those goals. This landscape approach, which combines both optimal



Scott Roemhildt

acres and optimal location, borrows heavily from the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

Private lands in the pheasant range account for more than 95 percent of the land base. Increases in pheasant populations will require a significant investment in private land habitat management; enrollment in voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs and easements; and some public land acquisitions. In many cases, wildlife objectives can be achieved on the least productive agricultural acres. This is often why landowners are eager to enroll their lands in conservation programs or sell their land to agencies for new public hunting areas. Using a “working lands” model, some production agriculture practices such as conservation grazing and haying also can be integrated into public lands habitat management where appropriate.

Agricultural production and conservation can readily coexist. Adding pollinator habitat will increase the productivity of dozens of crops.

In many cases, wildlife objectives can be achieved on the least productive agricultural acres.

Reducing soil erosion and keeping surface water clean will maintain field fertility, reduce algal blooms in lakes, and reduce the need for expensive water filtration equipment to downstream towns. Finally, expenditures for outdoor recreation diversify and benefit economies of local communities. Hunters spend \$1.32 billion in Minnesota annually, much of this in the rural parts of the state.

Actions defined in this plan are explicitly designed to increase pheasant habitat and pheasant populations. Because pheasants are dependent upon grassland habitat, they serve as indicator species for grassland conservation. Those grasslands also will provide habitat for waterfowl, songbirds, pollinators and hundreds of grassland-dependent wildlife species. ■

Summary

1. Target habitat enhancement and protection in complexes at least 9 square miles in size where we can meet a goal of 40 percent permanent protection within the timeframe of this plan.

Large blocks of habitat increase reproductive success, which is the most important limiting factor for pheasant populations. Using a Geographic Information System (GIS) and current land cover data, we will identify the best places for pheasant production and focus protection efforts on those areas to create permanent habitat complexes. This analysis will be repeated every two years to help monitor progress and refine goals.

2. Increase the rate of enrollment and retention in short-term conservation programs and the enrollment of permanent conservation easements by private landowners.

With 95 percent of the pheasant range in private ownership, increasing pheasant populations will depend on maximizing private land habitat. Demand for conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Re-invest In Minnesota

(RIM) Reserve far exceeds available program acres. Significant additional funding must be secured for practices and technical assistance to increase enrollment.

3. Increase education and marketing of private lands conservation programs through the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (FBAP).

The best tool for promoting Farm Bill and state conservation programs is the FBAP, which puts staff dedicated to private lands conservation into county offices. FBAP staff work with landowners to explain the full range of state and federal conservation programs and help landowners determine which program(s) are best suited to their land.

4. Increase management of habitat on both public and private lands.

Without periodic natural disturbances to prairie grasslands, diversity and productivity declines. Prescribed burning, tree removal, conservation grazing and haying are tools that can increase the quality of pheasant habitat.

Pheasants Forever

Carrol Henderson



5. Accelerate acquisition of public lands open to hunting across the pheasant range including state Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and federal Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs).

Increasing the amount of public wildlife land will create more habitat for grassland wildlife and provide more places and opportunities for hunting and other outdoor recreation pursuits.

6. Develop and implement a comprehensive riparian buffer program.

Buffers are permanent vegetation adjacent to waterways. They are important tools to prevent erosion. Buffers also can provide habitat benefits for wildlife. Working with landowners to develop the best buffers in terms of width, plant species mix and management practices can multiply the beneficial outcomes for all grassland wildlife.

7. Improve roadside management to optimize pheasant habitat.

While driver safety has to be the primary concern, roadsides can be improved for pheasants by increasing the diversity of the native plant community; using mowing practices that leave standing vegetation; and planting living snow fences that serve as winter cover.

8. Secure federal funding to sustain the Walk-In Access program in Minnesota's pheasant range.

Minnesota has been using a one-time legislative appropriation and competitive grants from the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to support and fund the Walk-In Access program. Without additional federal funding, the program cannot be sustained and public hunting opportunities may be lost.

9. Expand public education about grassland and pheasant conservation issues and support hunter recruitment and retention.

Citizens who are knowledgeable about the values and needs of grassland habitat will be supportive in taking action and securing resources to conserve and manage these habitats. By providing information and opportunities for new potential users, we can help create a new generation of hunter conservationists.

10. Expand monitoring and research capacity for both habitat and population studies of grassland wildlife and clearly communicate these results to the public.

There are more stressors on habitat and wildlife in Minnesota's pheasant range than ever before.

Minnesota needs to continue and expand habitat-based research and monitoring on pheasants and other grassland wildlife to ensure long-term sustainability. ■

Carmelita Nelson



Action Items

1. Target habitat enhancement and protection in complexes at least 9 square miles in size where we can meet a goal of 40 percent permanent protection within the timeframe of this plan.

Biologists know that life cycle needs of pheasants and other grassland wildlife species are best met in landscapes that are at least 9 square miles in size with 40 percent or more grass cover. This action item creates a strategic framework for the implementation of the following items. Additionally, provision of winter cover and winter food in these areas creates “complexes” that will optimize pheasant population success. This effort will build upon and enhance past work by focusing future land enhancement and protection in areas where there is already a significant public investment in conservation lands. Specific tasks include:

- Identify areas that are 15-40 percent grassland where the goal of 40 percent permanent protection can be reached within 10 years.
- Prioritize other public and private land habitat protection and enhancement efforts identified in Actions 2, 3, 4 and 5 in these habitat complexes.
- Establish complexes across the pheasant range to maintain pheasant populations as well as provide good hunting opportunities across the region.

Background

Studies have shown greater nest success among ground nesting grassland birds where there are larger patches of grassland. Nest success reaches a critical point for population expansion when 40 percent of a landscape is in grassland. Pheasants also need winter cover and winter food in close proximity in order to meet key life cycle needs. Optimal conditions for pheasant survival and population expansion can be fostered by providing 40 percent nesting cover, adequate winter cover and emergency winter food in a landscape of 9 square miles or larger—so called “habitat complexes.”



Carrol Henderson

Permanent protection of grasslands is critical to ensure these complexes exist into the future. Permanent protection is achieved via fee-title or easement acquisition through programs including: DNR Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), DNR Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA), USFWS National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), and perpetual conservation easements acquired through programs like the DNR Prairie Bank or Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve. Unprotected private pastures, hayfields, and lands in short-term programs like the CRP can be identified in these areas for permanent protection. By distributing these complexes across the state it will also distribute hunting pressure more evenly and create more hunting opportunities near population centers.

Regular maintenance activities (prescribed burning, woody vegetation control, etc.) need to be employed to keep these complexes in optimal condition. These large complexes are also ideal for conservation grazing on both public and private lands where livestock can be rotated around the landscape, simulating the patterns of native grazers and providing additional management options.

2. Increase the rate of enrollment and retention in short-term conservation programs and the enrollment of permanent conservation easements by private landowners.

Ninety-five percent of land in the pheasant range is privately owned, and a large percentage of the annual pheasant population is sustained here. Increases in pheasant populations will require a significant investment in private land conservation programs. Demand for conservation programs such as CRP and RIM Reserve far exceeds available dollars. Private conservation lands make a strong contribution to wildlife populations and water quality improvement but remain in private ownership and stay on the county and township tax rolls. Specific tasks include:

- Obtain approval for and implement a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) proposal to the Farm Service Agency

Ninety-five percent of land in the pheasant range is privately owned...

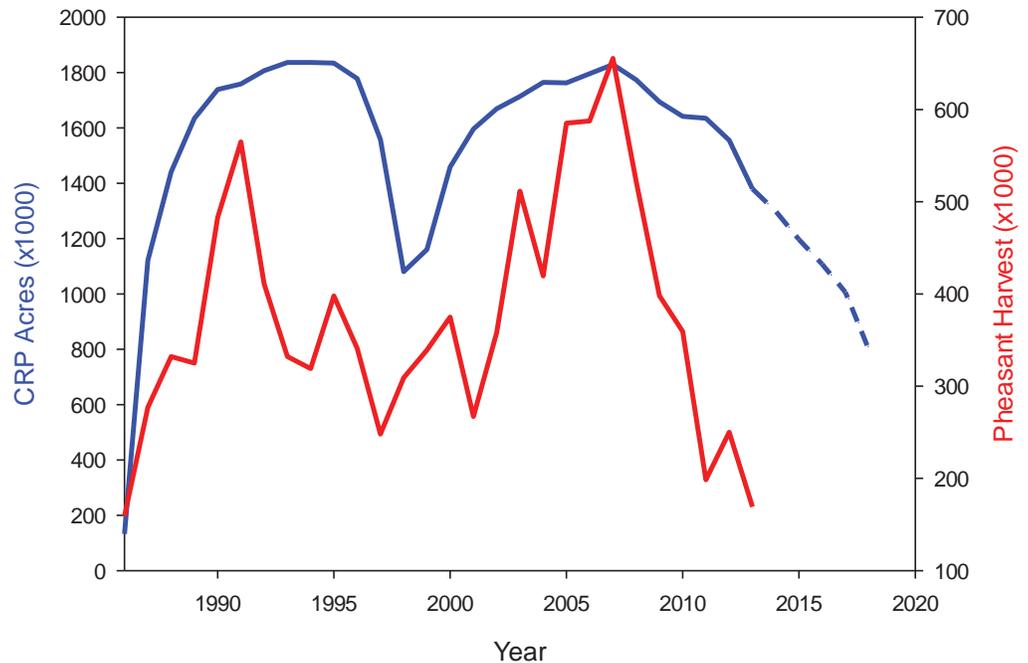
(FSA) that would permanently protect 100,000 acres of habitat in the pheasant range.

- Work with private landowners to retain as much as possible of the 501,000 CRP acres slated to expire in the next four years within the pheasant range. Re-enroll these acres in any new general CRP sign-up or Continuous-CRP (CCRP) practices when applicable.
 - Request an increase to existing acreage caps for MN State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) CP38e “Back Forty Pheasant Practice” of 20,000 acres per year and CP23a (wetland restoration practice) of 20,000 acres per year.
 - Sustain recent funding levels for RIM of \$20 million/year and work to increase this annual allocation to \$40 million per year.
 - Prioritize perpetual conservation easements into habitat complexes identified in Action Item 1.



As CRP acres increase and decrease on the landscape, pheasants follow the same trends. The dashed line on the right represents expiring CRP acres assuming no re-enrollment or new sign-ups.

Nesting habitat is the key to pheasant numbers.



Background:

No other program has had as profound an impact on Minnesota’s landscape and grassland wildlife populations as the Conservation Title of the Federal Farm Bill. In Minnesota, acres in conservation programs peaked in 2007 at 1.99 million acres with CRP making up 1.75 million of those acres. Despite growth in several land conservation programs, the state dropped to 1.53 million acres in 2014. This is largely due to the high losses in the largest program, CRP. Over the next four years, an additional 501,000 CRP acres will expire.

Minnesota’s highly successful RIM Reserve Program is a critical component of the state’s private lands conservation efforts. To date more than 6,200 permanent conservation easements totaling over 254,000 acres have been enrolled in the program.

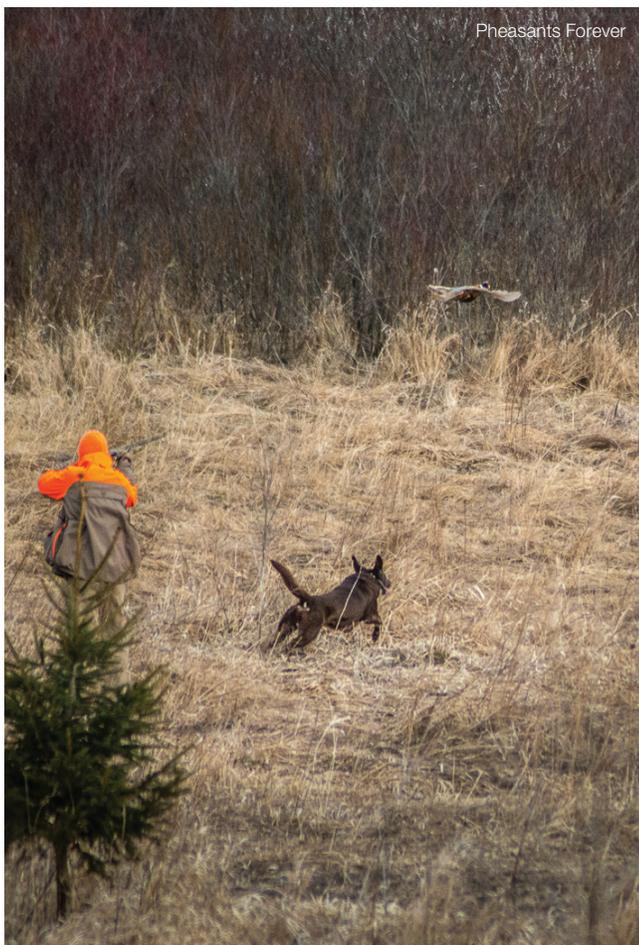
3. Increase education and marketing of private lands conservation programs through the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (FBAP).

Minnesota conservation agencies and organizations have developed a collaborative approach for promoting Farm Bill and state conservation programs called the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (FBAP). FBAP staff work with landowners to explain the full range of state and federal conservation programs and help them determine which program(s) are best suited to the landowner and land. Staff can also discuss management options with landowners to improve the existing habitat on their lands. Current funding provides for approximately 35 full time equivalents in 49 counties. Specific tasks include:

- Develop a marketing plan to ensure staff is aware of landowner contacts and that landowners get needed information at the right times.
- Secure funding to add 10 additional FBAP staff in the pheasant range.
- Identify funding sources to continue this \$3 million annual staffing effort from federal, state and local partners.

Background:

The FBAP is a joint effort between BWSR, DNR, Pheasants Forever (PF), Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD), the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF), and the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). The FBAP program works with SWCDs to accelerate local staff capacity by placing additional staff in the local USDA Service Center, with a primary focus to actively engage landowners and encourage them to enroll environmentally sensitive lands into voluntary conservation programs like the RIM Reserve program and CRP. This outreach connects landowners with the proper conservation program and practice that meets the landowner's goals and addresses the resource concern. Since its beginning in 2002, staff in the FBAP has enrolled 554,963 acres into state and federal conservation programs. Securing stable, long-term funding for this program will ensure that these staff can continue to provide outreach to landowners.



4. Increase management of habitat on both public and private lands.

Without periodic management to simulate natural disturbances (prescribed fire and conservation grazing), plant diversity declines, trees invade the grasslands, and productivity is reduced. Optimizing pheasant habitat also requires management activities such as food plots and winter cover (including cattails and native shrubs). When conducted with private cattle producers, grassland management can include rotational grazing, helping both wildlife and livestock. Specific tasks include:

- Secure Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) appropriations to increase public land habitat enhancement for nesting, brood-rearing, and winter habitat in the pheasant range.
- Implement a Working Lands approach to grassland conservation in key areas, integrating agricultural practices such as prescribed grazing and haying into habitat management. Develop program to increase private land prescribed burning and habitat management capacity.
- Work with partners to secure Farm Bill conservation program or North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grants to increase management.

Background:

Using OHF, there has already been an increased capacity to do habitat management on public lands to enhance nesting, brood-rearing, and winter cover for pheasants and other grassland wildlife. Three good examples are the DNR Roving Crews, The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Prairie Recovery Project, and the DNR Conservation Partnership Legacy (CPL) grant program. These efforts and acres are all additive to what existing agency staff is doing for habitat work. However, there are still many acres of public land in need of more active management.

Because management practices are often labor-intensive (and staff, equipment and trained contractors are limited) there is not enough capacity to maintain the health of Minnesota's grasslands.



This is especially challenging on private lands. For example, while many agency staff are trained to use prescribed fire on public lands, few private landowners have basic fire training and little equipment. New approaches are needed.

A remaining challenge is to secure funds to conduct habitat management/enhancement work on private lands. The DNR's Working Lands Initiative has funded some projects and there are NRCS programs for similar private lands work. Again, the demand is far greater than the resources for these programs.

Grazing and haying, when done with wildlife in mind, can be important habitat management tools on both public and private lands. The use of livestock to manage habitat on WMAs, WPAs, and NWR lands is increasing. This integrates public lands, habitat management, and production agriculture showing how all can benefit from these practices and demonstrate how multiple objectives can be met from one parcel of land.

5. Accelerate acquisition of public lands open to hunting across the pheasant range including DNR Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and USFWS Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA).

In the pheasant range, publicly accessible habitat often accounts for less than two percent of the landscape. This significantly restricts hunter opportunities and forces a large number of hunters into small areas. Accelerating the rate of public land acquisition, often low productivity acres and always from willing sellers, will both help increase the habitat base for grassland wildlife and create more opportunities for hunting and other forms of outdoor recreation. Specific tasks include:

- Seek state bonding, Environmental and Natural Resource Trust Fund (ENRTF), or federal dollars of up to \$10 million per year for public land acquisition.
- In cooperation with partners, seek \$40 million from the OHF for WMA and WPA acquisition.
- Target acquisitions into the habitat complexes identified in Action Item 1.

Background:

Most of the large public land holdings in Minnesota—WMAs, state forests, county lands and National Forests—are located in the northern and northeastern part of the state, outside the pheasant range. As grassland and wetland habitat has been lost in portions of western and southwestern Minnesota, demand for additional habitat and public hunting areas has increased. State and federal agencies have been purchasing public hunting areas from willing sellers since the 1950s. These acres have been used to create new DNR WMAs and USFWS WPAs. Additionally, funds have been used to purchase DNR SNAs and USFWS NWRs from willing sellers in the pheasant range.

These lands are acquired after extensive review and landscape modeling by both the DNR and USFWS through a comprehensive scoring process to identify the most critical tracts for wildlife purposes. These areas are often the least productive agricultural soils, which is why the landowner is interested in selling the land for habitat conservation.



Local units of government subsequently receive Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Revenue Sharing for lands acquired for WMAs and WPAs/ NWRs, respectively, to compensate local units of government for property taxes lost when lands are acquired for a public purpose.

6. Maximize the benefits of buffers for pheasants and other grassland wildlife.

Riparian buffers help keep surface waters clean by protecting them from erosion and runoff pollution. Buffers can also provide benefits for wildlife and pollinators with appropriate vegetation management. Landowners can optimize benefits of buffers by planting the appropriate species, increasing the size and width of the buffer, and with appropriate vegetation management. Specific tasks include:

- Implement the 2015 Buffer Initiative, which expands the scope of waters required to have buffers, sets timelines for implementation, provides for enforcement, and appropriates funding.
- Secure ongoing funding to work with SWCDs on enhancing existing and new buffers for pheasants.
- Develop and implement incentive programs to increase payments for landowners who improve buffers for wildlife beyond minimum requirements.

Background:

Minnesotans are proud of the lakes and rivers found here. However, in recent years, those waters have faced significant problems. A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) study from the southwest corner of the state found that only one of 93 stream sections studied were safe for human recreation and none of the lakes in that area met the safety standard. Surface water quality in much of Minnesota is impaired because of unchecked non-point runoff that carries sediment and other pollutants.

In 2015, Governor Dayton proposed, and the legislature approved, a new buffer requirement.

While the focus will be on water quality benefits, there are significant potential benefits for wildlife also.

For wildlife habitat, wider buffers are better. Buffers planted to a more diverse native grass and wildflower mix are better than grass monocultures. Landowners can be encouraged to enroll buffers in programs that will pay for these enhancements. Wider buffers can also be targeted on the landscape where they are most needed, such as at the base of steeper slopes with higher erosion rates.

Enhanced buffers will also be more suitable as pollinator habitat. The long narrow shapes of buffers and roadsides make them natural travel corridors allowing pollinators and wildlife to move around the landscape.

7. Improve roadside management to optimize pheasant habitat.

Roadsides represent a significant acreage of grassland across the pheasant range when federal, state, county, and township roads are all considered. While driver safety has to be the primary concern with roadsides, there are numerous ways to make roadsides more wildlife friendly. This can include increasing the diversity of the native plant community, using mowing practices that leave standing vegetation for nesting and brood rearing cover, and establishing living snow fences that could serve as winter cover. Specific tasks include:

- Revitalize the Interagency Roadsides for Wildlife Task Force and Roadsides for Wildlife Program.
- Use the task force to reinforce existing statutes related to roadsides conservation and identify new approaches to improving roadside habitat.
- Secure funding for county programs that integrate roadside vegetation.

“As a farmer, I have a 100-acre lake buffered, plus three-quarters of a mile of Redwood River buffered 120 feet. I’ve had this for more than 20 years and it hasn’t hurt my bottom line as I’m paid for the land in the buffer by CRP.”

**—Russ Pilegaard,
Ruthton, Outdoor News,
April 24, 2015**



Redwood SWCD

Background:

Due to their long narrow shape, nesting success in roadsides (and buffers) usually will not be as high as in large blocks of habitat. However, roadsides can be good brood rearing habitat and travel corridors for wildlife. State and federal highways offer the widest buffers and should be prioritized for attention. Also, these roadsides tend to have the greatest public ownership, so statutory restrictions on mowing are most stringent.

Currently many roadsides have relatively low levels of native plant diversity. Additionally, they are often mown or hayed multiple times each summer and often the entire ditch is mown/hayed. This can be most damaging when the first mowing occurs during the nesting season. By mowing the entire width of the ditch, no nesting or escape cover is left. While some mowing can maintain or alter the vegetation to benefit wildlife, mowing too much, too often, and too early can potentially be quite damaging to wildlife.

Iowa offers a model program for roadside management incorporating native grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs. A review of Iowa and other state’s roadsides programs may give Minnesota insights into how to improve roadside management for wildlife while still treating public safety as the primary concern.

8. Secure federal funding to sustain the Walk-In Access (WIA) program in the pheasant range in Minnesota.

Minnesota has been using a one-time legislative appropriation as well as competitive grants from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to support and fund the WIA program. Without additional federal funding, continuing the program would require a charge on hunters—something that surveys show won't work. Specific tasks include:

- Seek federal funds to expand the WIA program to 30,000 acres and/or more counties in the pheasant range.
- Explore other funding options if federal funds are not secured.

Background:

The Walk-In Access program (WIA) has been popular in its initial years. The state has gone from 6,039 acres enrolled in 2011/12 to 21,100 acres in 2014/15. Landowner participation has increased from 62 to 181 landowners over that time. In 2013/14, the DNR estimates that 18,460 hunters used the WIA program. SWCD offices and the FBAP are key to the implementation of the WIA program as they are almost always the first contact with landowners and do much of the mapping and contracting.

“Pheasants are farm game birds ... few other game birds are more intimately associated with agriculture.”

—Farris, Klonglan and Nomsen, The ring-necked pheasant in Iowa, 1977

WIA has been partially funded through an NRCS grant. In 2015, 23 states submitted funding requests to NRCS for a WIA program. At least \$29 million was requested from the \$20 million available through this program. With this competitive process, the success of funding cannot be guaranteed and, if awarded, only guarantees funding in three year increments. Permanent funding is needed to secure the long-term future of the program or the program will be discontinued.

9. Expand public education about grassland and pheasant conservation issues and support hunter recruitment and retention.

Informed and engaged people make the best decisions. The Minnesota conservation community will continue to work to explain the complexities of management and conservation issues as they relate to habitat and wildlife. There is also a need to provide information on pheasant hunting opportunities that is easy to access and to develop programs directed towards new or first-time hunters to encourage participation. Specific tasks include:

- Survey hunters to identify information needs and develop mobile apps, websites, and social media to inform and connect people with hunting and other outdoor recreational opportunities.
- Work with partners to develop a four-year communication strategy focused on educating and informing the public, hunters, and lawmakers on issues affecting pheasant hunting and habitat.
- Implement the Commissioner's Task Force recommendations on Hunter Recruitment and Retention.
- Develop a Pheasant Action Plan Scorecard to monitor and report progress on implementing strategies and actions and to inform the public on progress.



Background:

Multiple audiences (i.e., landowners, conservationists, consumers, businesses, citizens, community residents, etc.) have differing levels and topics of interest, and different concerns regarding grassland conservation. To promote grassland conservation we need to tailor messages to each group.

The DNR as well as Pheasants Forever and other conservation organizations frequently publish articles on different aspects of grassland conservation and these efforts will be accelerated. We will also work with events such as the State Fair, Farm Fest, Game Fair, etc., to communicate conservation messages to the public.

Hunters can already find maps of WMAs, WPAs, WIA sites on the web, at many locations in their local community, as well as agency offices. The WIA booklets provide maps with WMA, WPA, and WIA all on the same page. The DNR continues to work with social media to improve information and hunting guides.

10. Expand monitoring and research capacity for both habitat and population studies of grassland wildlife and clearly communicate these results to the public.

Minnesota needs to continue and expand research on grassland habitats and wildlife population responses. Monitoring the effects of restoration and enhancement activities is also critically important. Specific tasks include:

- Identify a four-year priority list of research and monitoring needs and secure additional funding for work on pheasant and prairie wildlife habitat.
- Identify needed management strategies in the face of climate change.
- Further cultivate relationships between agencies and universities to coordinate and sustain research.
- Clearly communicate the results of these activities with hunters and the public.

Background:

Although the DNR and others have been conducting habitat restoration, enhancement, and management projects for decades, many practitioners feel that we are just beginning to understand some of the complex processes we are attempting to replicate (restoration) or affect (enhancement/management). Every habitat project is an opportunity to learn and those lessons should be applied to future projects. In many cases we have a good general understanding, but many of the details are still unknown. Further, increasing intensity of land use by humans is having profound and often unmeasured impacts on wildlife populations.

The USFWS has developed a formal model for integrating monitoring and research into habitat management activities and landscape planning called Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC). This is a more formal version of the older process of adaptive management.

The DNR's population research and habitat monitoring programs should be integrated with efforts of the USFWS and Minnesota colleges and universities. ■

Two factors affect pheasant numbers above all others—habitat and weather. While we can't do much about the weather, we can control the quantity and quality of grassland habitat on the landscape.

Nicole Davros



Report Card

The DNR and partners are working to develop an annual “Report Card” for the actions listed above. The report card will be presented each year at the annual Governor’s Pheasant Opener as well as the DNR Roundtable. The Report Card will allow us to keep track of successes and determine where more efforts need to be focused.

“Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land.”

—Aldo Leopold

Acronym List

BWSR	Board of Water and Soil Resources
CCRP	Continuous Conservation Reserve Program
CPL	Conservation Partnership Legacy
CREP	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
ENRTF	Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund
FBAP	Farm Bill Assistance Partnership
FSA	Farm Service Agency
GIS	Geographic Information System
MASWCD	Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
MPCA	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
NAWCA	North American Wetland Conservation Act
NRCS	National Resource Conservation Service
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
PILT	Payment in Lieu of Taxes
RIM	Reinvest in Minnesota
SHC	Strategic Habitat Conservation
SNA	Scientific and Natural Area
SWCD	Soil and Water Conservation District
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
WIA	Walk-In Access
WMA	Wildlife Management Areas
WPA	Waterfowl Production Areas



The Office of the Governor



Something to crow about.

**For more information and updates, visit:
mndnr.gov/pheasantsummit**