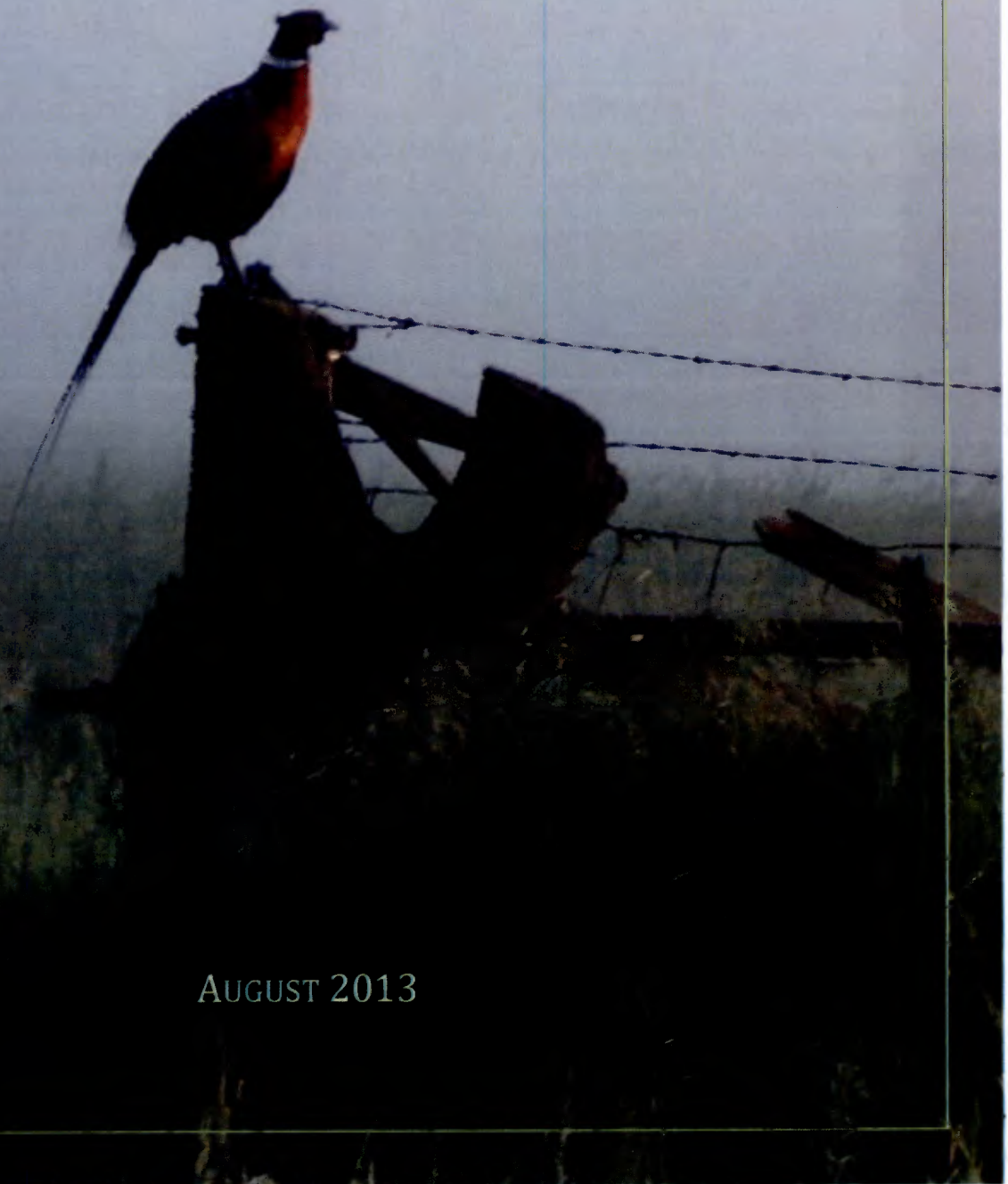


# NATIONAL WILD PHEASANT CONSERVATION PLAN



AUGUST 2013

# PLAN IMPLEMENTATION OBJECTIVES

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## **PERSONNEL**

*Objective:* Identify and hire a National Ring-necked Pheasant Conservation Coordinator.

*Justification:* This plan was initiated by the Midwest Pheasant Study Group in Nebraska in 2006 and approved by the MAFWA Directors in 2007. This plan was not completed until 2012, some 6 years later. The slow progress in plan development was simply due to the lack of time by individual state upland biologists to focus on the plan. For the plan to succeed, a full-time coordinator will be needed, as state pheasant biologists are stretched too thin with state responsibilities to effectively implement a national plan.

We strongly suggest the hiring of a plan coordinator and identification of a funding source should be the first action undertaken by this national plan. We further suggest the first two priorities of this coordinator be the establishment of a national pheasant management board and a national wild ring-necked pheasant technical committee, expanding the former Midwest Pheasant Study Group. This 3 pillar approach has been very successfully used by the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative and would work equally as well for this plan.

### **Future Actions:**

1. Seek funding for and hire an individual for the position of plan coordinator.
1. Establish and appoint a national pheasant management board (comprised of state level administrators and key partners to provide oversight and guidance).
1. Establish a national ring-necked pheasant technical committee (representing the needs and objectives of all states and partners).

## **POLICY**

*Objective:* Influence national conservation, agricultural and energy policies, which are beneficial to ring-necked pheasant.

*Justification:* The ring-necked pheasant is a naturalized game bird of primarily agricultural landscapes. Given appropriate interspersion and management of agricultural and grassy habitat types, pheasants have demonstrated the ability to achieve high population levels from Pennsylvania to Oregon and from North Dakota to Texas. Preferred habitats include row crop/small grain agricultural practices interspersed with grassland/wetland habitats. It uses shrub/brush habitats, but generally avoids mature woodlands. Because of its affinity to agricultural lands and most agricultural lands are privately owned, pheasant populations

Hire FSA/NRCS liaison.


## **PARTNERSHIPS**

*Objective:* Identify partners in government and non-government agencies, agriculture, economic, and conservation communities to help implement the plan.

*Justification:* Partnerships large and small create opportunity and often result in synergistic results in any endeavor. Never is this more apparent than in the realm of wildlife conservation. Partnerships have become the contemporary model for moving conservation efforts in a positive direction at local to national scales. As an example, this very plan is the collaborative work of multiple state agencies partnering in an effort to nationalize pheasant conservation efforts. There are multiple public and private parties critical to the implementation of this plan.

The technical committee will make contact and possibly partner with the below groups, organizations and agencies. Partnerships with these groups will be key to plan implementation and on the ground management actions to improve habitat for wild pheasants and other wildlife. Many of the below organizations have strong track records for insuring the conservation of wildlife through habitat management. Because pheasants inhabit agroecosystems, private landowner contact, buy-in, and incentive programs will be key to plan implementation. Most of the partners listed have strong ties to private lands, and many already have incentive programs in place. By working together these partners can move a national conservation effort forward successfully, one project at a time.

### **Future Actions:**

 The technical committee will make contact and possibly partner with the below groups, organizations and agencies.

#### **o Governmental Agencies & Organizations**

State Wildlife Agencies  
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
US Dept of Agriculture  
- Natural Resource Conservation Service  
- Farm Service Agency  
US Fish & Wildlife Service  
- Joint Ventures  
- Landscape Conservation Cooperatives  
US Bureau of Land Management  
US Forest Service  
Northern Bobwhite Technical Committee

#### **o Non-Governmental Organizations**

American Bird Conservancy  
National Audubon Society  
National Shooting Sports Foundation  
National Wild Turkey Federation

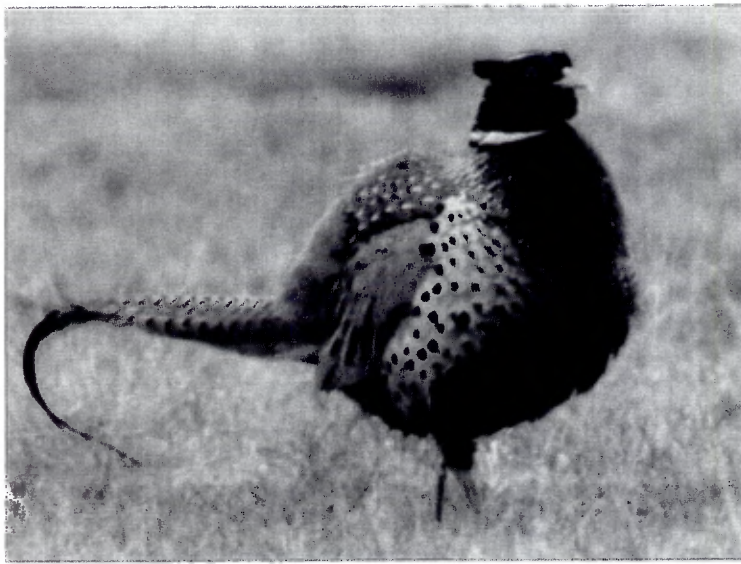


## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Though not a native species of North America, the Ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) adapted to its agricultural landscape and became an important piece in the fabric of the country's hunting tradition. Today, the ring-necked pheasant is not only revered by the hunting community, it is an economically important and highly sought-after game bird. It is likely that pheasant hunters spend over half of a billion dollars each year pursuing ring-necked pheasant in this country alone.

Due to the continual loss of pheasant habitat from the conversion of grass and scrubland habitat to



Cock ring-necked pheasant/D. Rehder, Pheasants Forever

cropland, the development of "clean" farming practices, the decline in agricultural diversity, urban/suburban sprawl, and reforestation, pheasant populations across large portions of the range are in significant decline. Additionally, the looming loss of CRP habitat in much of the Midwest and Great Plains puts concern on current stable populations as well. Potential cuts to Farm Bill conservation programs are another concern and threat to pheasant habitat across the range.

It is our hope that this plan will shed light on the importance of this game bird across its range and the issues currently and potentially facing this popular game bird.

With the goal to "restore and maintain self-sustaining wild pheasant populations in each state to provide maximum recreational opportunities", this plan will focus efforts on pheasant habitat creation and restoration through policy, partnerships, education, and research at state, regional, and national levels.

To implement this plan and accomplish the plan's goal, leadership is needed. This leadership will come from AFWA, agencies directors, designated regional coordinator, state biologists, and most importantly, a full-time National Wild Pheasant Conservation Coordinator. Without a dedicated coordinator, this important conservation plan, like many others before it, will struggle to gain momentum and will likely not spur successful results.

grains and more powerful combines have together resulted in reduced crop-stubble height, leaving pheasants more vulnerable to predation and adverse weather. In regions of the intermountain west and the Pacific states where irrigation is essential to producing crops, a side effect of increased efficiency in water distribution and application systems has been elimination of many grassy and/or weedy areas once critical to producing and holding pheasants.

But not all changes in the pheasant range have been negative. The development of no-till farming and its specialized seeding equipment allows the farmer to plant crops and control weeds without turning the soil. New cold-tolerant varieties of winter wheat are steadily replacing spring wheat in the northern plains. Since winter wheat is seeded in the fall, it can develop ground cover of sufficient height for nesting and brood rearing much sooner in the spring than was previously provided by spring wheat. The development of the Shelbourne stripper header now allows farmers to harvest wheat and other small grains while leaving the “stubble” at virtually the same height it was before harvest. This taller stubble provides better cover than stubble left after harvest with a conventional sickle-bar header.

### ***ECONOMICS***

Few occasions bring more activity to quiet rural towns within the pheasant belt of North America than the opening days of pheasant season. Many friends and families make it a tradition to pheasant hunt together as a group at least once each year. Other sportsmen travel from across the nation and even from foreign countries to experience the excitement of pheasant hunting. This fluster of activity not only changes the look of many small towns, it bolsters local and regional economies through hunting related expenditures.

Within the core pheasant range in the Midwest, many businesses receive a crucial amount of their annual income during the relatively short pheasant hunting season.

Local diners, motels, gas stations, grocery stores and state wildlife

agencies all benefit greatly from the money generated from these sportsmen. But how much money is generated, and how could this be influenced by declining pheasant populations?



Illinois pheasant hunter and his dogs/Illinois DNR

From 2006 to 2009, an average of nearly 1.1 million sportsmen bagged nearly 6.1 million wild pheasants annually in 25 states across the pheasant range. While in pursuit of ring-necks, sportsmen spent just over 6.1 million days afield, and they pumped over \$502 million annually into local



economies. The estimated cost of a harvested bird was \$68 for resident hunters and \$118 for non-resident hunters, for a combined average of \$83 for every rooster harvested (Appendix B).

It has been well demonstrated in several states how number of hunters and harvest decline when pheasant populations decline. The tremendous effort and money spent in the pursuit of ring-necked pheasants should represent further justification for the conservation of this species and their habitats. There are many stakeholders besides pheasant hunters that would benefit from a plan aimed at preserving populations of this great game bird.

### ***JUSTIFICATION***

Why create a national plan to promote the conservation of wild ring-necked pheasant populations? Currently, multiple conservation plans have been or are being developed for native gallinaceous birds (i.e., quail and grouse species) due to declining populations and habitats. No doubt, there are those who dismiss the ring-necked pheasant as just another exotic species. To be sure, problems have often outweighed benefits with many other introductions of exotics. But, generally, this has not been the case with ring-necked pheasants. Though isolated instances of inter-specific competition do occur between pheasants and native prairie grouse, in the vast majority of their range



Ring-necked pheasant in seasonal wetland/Utah DWR

pheasants have not displaced native galliformes, but rather filled habitat niches that became available after agricultural development occurred.

Pheasants in North America have become a powerful engine for conservation. The strong desire to see and pursue this beautiful game bird has motivated generations of hunters to conserve and create wildlife habitat. Pheasants require habitats that benefit multiple species of wildlife. Conservation efforts small and large aimed at conserving pheasants will have a myriad of

benefits to native wildlife, specifically grassland species. Pheasants are truly a “flagship” species in our agro-ecosystems since the habitats created on their behalf benefit many less charismatic species. Without the work of the many advocates who mainly know conservation through their interest in pheasants, it seems unlikely that our collective efforts to control soil erosion and improve water quality would be as effective as they are today.

Without ring-necks, how many urbanites might have less understanding of rural America, and vice-versa? How many youngsters might never have experienced the camaraderie and exhilaration of the hunt in the crisp air of fall? And how many of those might have never learned the love for the land that they possess today? Those who now care for the land would have loved to experience the

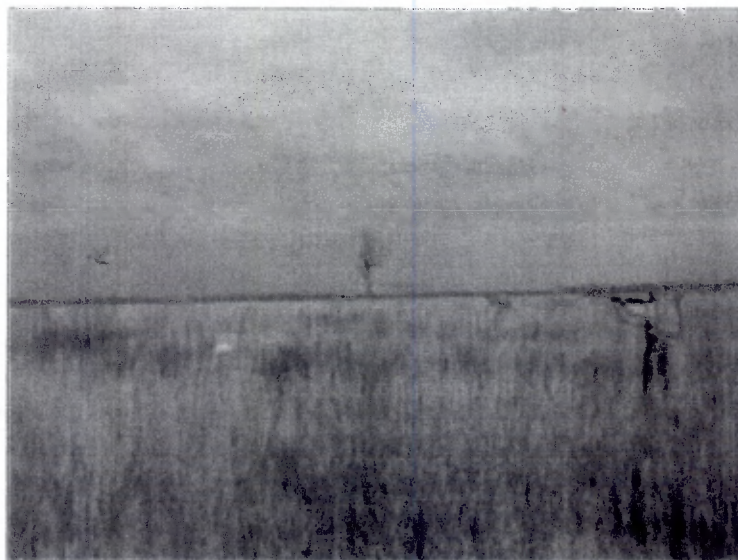
wildness of the prairie before it was turned and tamed by John Deere's plow. Of course, that can never be. But it seems likely the heart-pounding thrill of taking a first pheasant isn't so different from that experienced by young Indians on their first bison hunts 150 years ago. This keeps us connected to the land. Nothing is more important. Outdoor interest from our rising generation is decreasing, and as a result hunting and fishing license sales, which have traditionally supported wildlife management in this country, are following suit. Arguably, the pheasant has been the reason for more introductions to the outdoors pursuits across its range than any other wildlife species. Youth recruitment into hunting and fishing is critical to the future of wildlife management, and this species is critical to that recruitment.

Stated simply, the pheasant has captured the heart of the American sportsman and has an enormous economic impact to the country.

The reality of this economic influence can be seen from state agency budgets to local communities that benefit from the sportsman's dollar. The economic impact of pheasant hunting can wield a large socio-political interest in conservation,

even influencing the habitat pheasant and other wildlife depend on. Agricultural policies that are more conservation oriented have come about due, at least in part, to this exotic species. The economy generated by the singular interest in this wildlife species cannot be ignored, nor the efforts afforded by organizations, such as Pheasants Forever, that generate funds aimed at pheasant conservation.

This plan is not simply a necessary accumulation of statistics that document where we have been and what we hope to retain for the future. It represents an important step aimed at finding a way to keep the ring-necked pheasant an integral part of our agricultural landscape and our culture.



Ring-necked pheasant hunting in Illinois/Illinois DNR

### ***THE GOAL OF THE NATIONAL WILD PHEASANT CONSERVATION PLAN***

**Restore and maintain self-sustaining wild pheasant populations in each state to provide maximum recreational opportunities.**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Gratefully acknowledging the Directors of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Resident Game Bird Working Group for their support and leadership in allowing the development of this document and its final approval in 2013, and the wildlife professionals who dedicated their time to author this document: **Todd Bogenschutz** (Iowa Department of Natural Resources), **Beth Emmerich** (Missouri Department of Conservation), **Sharon Fandel** (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources), **Dave Dahlgren** (Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism), **Kurt Haroldson** (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources), **Stan Kohn** (North Dakota Game and Fish Department), **Jeff Lusk** (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission), **Joey McCanna** (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife), **Randy Rodgers** (Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism/retired), **Travis Runia** (South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks), **Budd Veverka** (Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife), **Scott Walter** (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources), and **Mike Wefer** (Illinois Department of Natural Resources).

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# NATIONAL WILD PHEASANT CONSERVATION PLAN

## Coordinator Position Description

**1. JOB PURPOSE:** Directs the advancement and successful implementation of the National Wild Pheasant Conservation Plan (NWPCP). NWPCP is a plan directed at restoring wild ring-necked pheasant populations through large-scale habitat conservation across the entire range of the species. The NWPCP coordinator will provide consultation to a variety of federal, state, and private conservation organizations on policies, programs, projects and practices related to agriculture and habitat conservation for wild ring-necked pheasant and other grassland-forb wildlife species. This position operates under the general supervision of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) Directors, and the direct supervision of the National Pheasant Management Board (comprised of state level administrators and key partners to provide oversight and guidance). The coordinator will exercise a great deal of independence in developing program priorities and actions necessary for implementation of the NWPCP.

### **2. JOB TASKS:**

#### Essential Functions:

Lead and develop a national pheasant management board comprised of state level administrators and key partners to provide oversight and guidance to plan implementation and development. Establish a national ring-necked pheasant technical committee representing the needs and objectives of all states and partners. Coordinate with, and provide consultation to state wildlife agency directors and technical staff, as well as other conservation organization leaders to ensure that wild pheasant needs and objectives are fully considered in other grassland conservation planning activities such as NABCI Bird Conservation Regions, NAWMP Joint Ventures, Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, and the North American Prairie Grouse Partnership.

#### **Percent of Time**

30%

Represent, promote and act on behalf of the NWPCP and the MAFWA at national, regional and state meetings, including but not limited to: MAFWA director's annual conference, AWFA annual conference, North American Wildlife Conference, Partner's In Flight annual meeting, and Pheasant Forever National Convention.

30%

Advise as many as 30 states on methodologies to develop public/private multi-organizational task forces that will facilitate achievement of NWPCP goals on the state level. Research opportunities and develop grant proposals for large-scale wild pheasant and grassland-forb wildlife habitat projects.

20%

Research, track and disseminate up-to-date information regarding relevant federal and state habitat conservation programs and policies to state, federal and non-government wild pheasant advocates. Provide liaison to lawmakers, congressional staff and administration agency leaders concerning legislation and policy. Negotiate authorization of new programs and changes to existing programs that will provide positive habitat benefits for wild pheasants and grassland birds, particularly in the agricultural policy arena.

15%

Submit written monthly and annual activity reports to the MAFWA Midwest Pheasant Study Group liaison. Evaluate program milestones and recommend changes to initiative direction to the state agency directors as needed. Administer a budget, accounting for all expenditures and submitting periodic budget reports.

5%

## **Proposed NWPCP Coordinator Budget**

### **FY 2016 (July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016)**

Salary	\$70,000
Benefits (25%)	\$17,500
Travel (20%)	\$14,000
Operations/supplies (10%)	<u>\$ 7,000</u>
	\$108,500

Twenty three states contributed data toward the NWPCP and 6 affiliate states with small or limited pheasants populations contributed ancillary information, but did not contribute information toward habitat or population goals. The Midwest Pheasant Study Group proposes the NWPCP coordinator position be funded similar to the national bobwhite conservation initiative (NBCI), by contributions from states who are members of the plan. Assuming all 23 states that provided data to the NWPCP contributed \$5,000 each (\$115,000) and each affiliate state contributed \$1,000 each (\$6,000) would provide \$121,000 annually to fund a NWPCP coordinator.

#### Other considerations:

- Administration for collecting and dispersing NWPCP coordinator funds:
  - Initially (2004) with NBCI, since it was a SEAFWA project, SEAFWA collected dues from the states and Wildlife Management Institute, thru an agreement with SEAFWA, handled administrative tasks for 15% overhead. MAFWA could pursue a similar type arrangement perhaps with Pheasants Forever.
  - SEAFWA put out an RFP for permanently housing the NBCI in 2008. The University of Tennessee was awarded the RFP and handles all administrative tasks and charges 0% overhead.
  - The NBCI is moving toward a state P-R funding model for FY15 thru University of Tennessee. Long term NBCI will be funded by an endowment foundation.
- Pheasants Forever (2012) offered to house a NWPCP coordinator, which would significantly reduce operational costs in the proposed budget.
- Proposed budget costs could be reduced further if coordinator was recently retired with a full pension and therefore willing to work for less.



**For more information, please contact:**

**Pilot Area Coordinators:**

<u>Counties</u>	<u>Contact</u>
Hillsdale	<b>Dennis Tison</b>
Lenawee	517-263-7400 ext. 119
Monroe	dennis.tison@mi.nacdnet.net
Huron	<b>Jeff Jones</b>
Sanilac	989-673-8174 ext. 3
Tuscola	jeffrey.w.jones@mi.usda.gov
Clinton	<b>Monique Ferris</b>
Gratiot	989-875-3900 ext. 101
Saginaw	monique.ferris@mi.nacdnet.net

**If you are not located within the pilot areas,  
you may contact:**

**Bill Vander Zouwen**

Pheasants Forever Regional Representative  
616-450-2385  
bvanderzouwen@pheasantsforever.org

**Al Stewart**

Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Upland Game Bird Specialist and Program Leader  
517-284-6221  
stewartal@michigan.gov

**Initial MPRI partners include:**

- Pheasants Forever - [www.michiganpheasantsforever.org](http://www.michiganpheasantsforever.org)
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources -  
[www.michigan.gov/pheasant](http://www.michigan.gov/pheasant)
- Michigan Department of Agriculture and  
Rural Development
- Ducks Unlimited - [www.ducks.org/michigan](http://www.ducks.org/michigan)
- Michigan United Conservation Clubs - [www.mucc.org](http://www.mucc.org)
  - Conservation Districts
  - National Wild Turkey Federation -  
[www.nwtf.org/michigan](http://www.nwtf.org/michigan)
  - US Department of Agriculture
  - Michigan State University Extension
- US Fish and Wildlife Service - [www.fws.gov/midwest](http://www.fws.gov/midwest)
  - other conservation organizations and YOU!

**You Can Help!**



## **Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative**

**RESTORING HABITAT TOGETHER**



**You're invited to help  
restore and revitalize habitat  
on private and public lands to increase  
pheasant populations in Michigan.**

[www.michigan.gov/pheasant](http://www.michigan.gov/pheasant)



**T**he Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative is a grass-roots conservation initiative started in 2011 to help neighbors work together as a “cooperative” to restore pheasant populations and habitat in Michigan’s traditional pheasant range.

Pheasants rely on high-quality grassland and agricultural areas for adequate cover and food resources throughout their life. Changes in agricultural practices, urbanization, and reforestation have contributed to their declining numbers. Your help is needed to improve pheasant habitat and populations in your local area.

## Initiative Goals

Set within a 10-year timeframe (2011–2020), key initiative goals include:

- Increasing pheasant populations;
- Positively impacting 200,000 acres for pheasants by restoring and/or enhancing high quality blocks of habitat on the broader landscape;
- Restoring, enhancing or maintaining 25,000 acres of high-quality grassland habitat for pheasants on public and private lands within the 200,000-acre focus area;
- Securing sustainable funding and necessary resources to implement the initiative;
- Expanding access to pheasant hunting on public and private lands;
- Recruiting, retaining and reconnecting with small game hunters.

## Pilot Areas

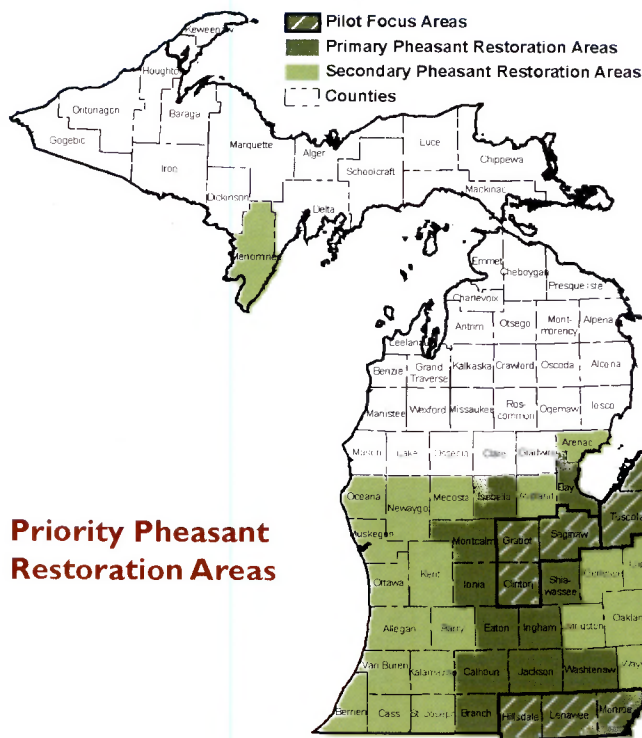
Partners of the initiative identified 3 pilot areas in which to focus initial restoration efforts. These were chosen based on evaluation of pheasant numbers present, available habitat, and habitat restoration potential. These areas are:

- Huron, Sanilac, and Tuscola counties
- Clinton, Gratiot, and Saginaw counties
- Hillsdale, Lenawee, and Monroe counties

## Benefits of the Initiative Go Beyond Pheasants

The initiative will:

- Increase habitat for grassland wildlife species
- Boost soil and water quality
- Enhance, beautify and protect open spaces
- Support beneficial pollinator species
- Create lasting partnerships
- Leave a legacy for future generations



## Priority Pheasant Restoration Areas

## Habitat Restoration

Restoring pheasant habitat on both private and public lands is vital to increasing pheasant numbers. Every acre of high-quality habitat is important, whether it be a few or many acres. However, the larger the block of habitat, the more likely it is to support a greater number and density of pheasants. Ideally cooperatives involving both public and private lands that provide at least 1,200-2,000 acres of high-quality pheasant habitat within a 10,000-acre area will have the greatest success at restoring pheasant populations and hunting opportunities. Such cooperatives fulfilling these basic habitat requirements may also be eligible to receive wild-trapped pheasants from a prime pheasant production state in the Midwest if the local pheasant population does not positively respond as expected.

## Join the Initiative

The best way to increase pheasant populations is through restoration of pheasant habitat on both public and private lands. Every acre counts. Those who partner with others to work on larger blocks of land that link multiple private ownerships to public land through habitat cooperatives will have an even greater positive impact on pheasant habitat and numbers. Now is the time to act to restore the pheasant in Michigan’s traditional pheasant range. To do this, we need your help! Please contact one of the people listed on the back page.