

2008 Midwest Pheasant Study Group

10th Meeting, Old Woman Creek National Estuarine Research Reserve,
Huron, Ohio

Towards Development of a National Pheasant Conservation Plan



Sept. 21-24, 2008

Hosted by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources,
Division of Wildlife

&

Ohio Pheasants Forever

**Report from the 2008 Midwest Pheasant Study Group,
A Technical Working Committee of the
Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies**

Table of Contents

Meeting Agenda

Meeting Summary

Information for the Director

List of Attendees

State Reports

Appendices

Outline for a National Pheasant Conservation Plan



MIDWEST PHEASANT STUDY GROUP

Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri,
Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin

2008 MIDWEST PHEASANT STUDY GROUP MEETING

AGENDA

- Sunday, Sept. 21, 2008 Arrival throughout the day
- 6:00 p.m. Social at Old Woman Creek dorm facility
- Monday, Sept. 22, 2008 7:30 a.m. BREAKFAST (provided)
- 9:00 a.m. Introductions and State Reports
- 10:30 a.m. Report on Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative. For Discussion: Role of MPSG in the national quail plan
- Noon: LUNCH (provided)
- 1:00 p.m. Discussion on the National Pheasant Plan
- Topics: Logistics of a National Plan vs. Regional Group; Funding Sources
- 5:30 p.m. Adjourn for the day
- 6:30 p.m. DINNER (provided)
- Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2008 7:30 a.m. BREAKFAST (provided)
- 9:00 a.m. Discussion on the National Pheasant Plan
- Topics: Development of a working outline and chapters; development of draft budget; develop population and habitat goals;

	Noon:	LUNCH (provided)
	1:00 p.m.	Continue discussion on the National Pheasant Plan
	5:30 p.m.	Adjourn for the day
	6:30 p.m.	DINNER (provided) Fish Fry at the Inland Seas Maritime Museum, Vermillion, OH (http://www.inlandseas.org/)
Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2008	7:30 a.m.	BREAKFAST (provided)
	9:00 a.m.	Farm bill update, discussion on biofuels, carbon credits, and other policy issues.
	10:30 a.m.	Discussion: Available research on artificial propagation systems (i.e. The Surrogator); HSUS document on pheasant management
	Noon	Meeting adjourns, LUNCH on your own.

Executive Summary – Out-of-state members of the MPSG arrived throughout the day on Sunday, Sept. 21, 2008 to Old Woman Creek Reserve where we enjoyed a pizza social sponsored by Ohio Pheasants Forever. Frank Lopez, manager of Old Woman Creek Estuarine Reserve, welcomed the group on Tuesday and provided some information about the activities there.

Discussion on Monday began with states reporting about current pheasant research and management activities. **Ohio** is currently reviewing data collection methods on state roadside pheasant surveys, and is including time-removal methodology to estimate bird detectability. **Pennsylvania** has recently finalized a statewide management plan that includes habitat restoration on several 10,000 acre focus areas. Once habitat restoration goals are met, they will release 300 wild pheasants per year for 3 years to re-establish wild populations. Radiotelemetry will be used to monitor hen survival on these focus areas. **Nebraska** has recently completed an evaluation of the Surrogator artificial brooding system (see below). Mid-contract management is currently underway in Nebraska, with pheasants as the management focus. **Michigan** reported that their core pheasant range in the southwest part of that state is being affected by urban and suburban development, and prospects for pheasant restoration in the state are not good at broad landscape scales. Michigan no longer releases pen-reared birds. In **Illinois** there is no current pheasant research, but a draft pheasant management plan is in development. Acreage enrolled in CRP in Illinois is about even between buffers and whole fields, however, more buffers are enrolled in central Illinois where there are greater pheasant densities, with more whole fields enrolled in northwest Illinois where pheasant numbers are lower. John Cole stated that there is a need to develop Farm Bill conservation programs that are attractive to large farming operations. There is no current research in **Kansas**, but there are current studies on burning regimes on CRP and impacts on grassland birds in general. KDWP recently completed a survey of hunters and farm operators regarding opening dates for quail vs. pheasant seasons. **South Dakota** reported a loss of CRP in the past year with a projected loss of 235,000 acres by 2013. In addition to total CRP loss, current enrollment reflects a shift from whole fields to buffers. Loss of CRP acres and shifts away from whole fields will mean a loss of acres available to their hunter walk-in program. **Indiana** is currently reviewing their upland game surveys after going several years without an upland biologist. Bud Ververka will make attempts to reinstate the RMC and several other surveys in Indiana, and stated that there is concern over the developing wind power industry in that state. **Iowa** reported pheasant declines have been occurring since 1996, primarily due to loss of CRP. They have established a habitat restoration program to boost pheasant populations, with approximately \$250,000 per year invested on habitat. This effort has impacted 5% of CRP in the counties in which habitat work has been done. Current research includes a study of passerine use of different CRP practices (CP1, CP2, etc.) within grassland complexes. Late season pheasant mortality is being studied on certain wildlife areas. A master survey on hunter opinions about various programs has been instituted. Some interest has been expressed in a hunter access program, but nothing has been developed yet. A state income tax credit of \$2 per acre has been proposed for farmers allowing hunter access.

An update was given by Nathan Stricker and Dave Scott about recent changes with the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative (NBCI) and activities taking place by SEAFWA and the Southeast Quail Study Group to move the NBCI toward a nationally-operating organization through the University of Tennessee. There was some discussion as to what participation the MPSG may have in the future of the NBCI. Current participation by MAFWA members includes Tom Dailey (MO, steering committee), Jim Pitman (KS, steering committee) and Nathan Stricker (OH, vice chair/chair research committee). SEQSG name change—at the SEAFWA Directors’ Business Meeting, the Directors unanimously approved a request from the NBCI Transition Board and the SEQSG Steering Committee that the name of the Southeast Quail Study Group be changed to one (to be confirmed later) without a geographical reference, such as “NBCI Technical Committee”. This largely symbolic change is intended as a good-faith gesture from the Southeast to the bobwhite states in other regions, but also likely is the initial groundwork for eventually expanding the SEQSG to fulfill the future role of the national NBCI technical committee. The process for determining and deciding on the name change is being developed, and should be complete by March 2009.

The group spent the remainder of Monday and much of Tuesday developing materials for a National Pheasant Conservation Plan. We developed a working outline, identified volunteers from the group that will develop content on some parts of the outline, and developed a timetable for work to be completed on the National Plan. Using this timetable, the MPSG hopes to have a first draft of a National Plan by May 2010. Some of the group’s discussion included the logistical aspects of accomplishing work in this timeframe, and we came to the consensus that we cannot currently meet every other year as has been the practice with the group. Also, the group recognized that participation from MAFWA’s Private Lands Working Group will be beneficial for developing Ag Policy content in the plan, and that states outside of MAFWA but within the pheasant’s range should have input to make this a true national plan. We therefore proposed that the MPSG meet again in May 2009 in conjunction with the MAFWA Private Lands Working Group May 3-6, 2009 near Mt. Vernon, IL. The MPSG will meet again in Oct. 2009 in North Dakota (dates and location TBA), at which time other states would be invited to participate at the meeting and in Plan development. Director Action and Information Items provide more detail, below.

Jeff Lusk presented the results of research in Nebraska investigating pheasant survival when incorporating an artificial brooding device (i.e., “Surrogator). Results to date suggest that the device used in this project did not significantly increase pheasant survival

Al Stewart brought to the group’s attention some documents developed by the Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS) that denounces state practices involving pheasant/gamebird management, including stocking of farm-raised birds for recreational opportunities.

Randy Rodgers presented an upland game habitat plan that he has been recommending to some Kansas landowners. This habitat plan includes establishing tapered grass and forb island strips within existing cropland to provide cover for gamebirds.

Director Action Items –

Director Information Items

Time and Place of Next Meeting - Sept./Oct. 2009 in North Dakota.

Appendices –

Appendix 1: Draft Outline for a National Pheasant Plan

Pheasant Plan Outline

- I. Introduction: Need for a National Pheasant Plan
 - a. Valued by sportsmen, tradition
 - b. Economic impacts to rural economies
 - c. Declining participation by sportsmen
 - d. Species that has adapted to modern, anthropogenically-influenced, agricultural landscapes
 - e. Historically a representative of grassland management and preservation over much of central North America
 - f. Engine/flagship for upland conservation
 - g. Overview/compendium of rest of plan

- II. Historic populations
 - a. Introduction era (pre-1940)
 - b. Period of peak populations (will vary by state/region) (1940-1970)
 - c. Changes in agricultural technology, and impacts on land use and pheasant populations (1970-present)

- III. Goals
 - a. Restore or maintain self-sustaining pheasant populations in each state that provide maximum recreational opportunities.
 - i. **OBJECTIVE:** Develop population measures based on long-term average harvest as determined appropriate by each state, contributed toward a national goal.
 - ii. Identify habitat levels needed to achieve harvest objectives.
 - iii. Identify projected economic impact that could result by achieving harvest objectives.
 - iv. Identify projected benefits to other game and priority non-game species, soil and water quality, and carbon sequestration resulting from established habitat.
 - v. Identify potential benefits and costs to sustainable pheasant populations associated with application of alternative energy methods.

IV. STRATEGIES

- a. Influence national agricultural policy (e.g. program availability, rule changes, etc.) to establish XXX acres of habitat through federal conservation and commodity programs.
- b. Determine conditions for biofuel production that are compatible with pheasant harvest objectives and develop BMP's associated with pheasant management.
- c. Identify partners in government, non-government, agricultural, economic, and conservation communities.
- d. Identify economic incentives (income tax, community development, etc.) to promote pheasant populations
- e. Identify funding sources for achieving state or regional goals/objectives.
- f. Influence national energy policies that are beneficial to national pheasant goals/objectives.
- g. Promote research that informs states/regions about land planning, land use, habitat placement, impacts of climate change, and consequences for pheasant populations.
- h. Promote education of and communication with landowners, sportsmen, and other interests (community development, other partners) about programs, population/habitat needs, benefits to economy, conservation values.
- i. Promote information about additional benefits to water and soil quality, habitat-associated species, carbon sequestration, and other benefits associated with establishment of additional pheasant habitats.

V. Proposed regional organization for pheasant plan administration, by general landscape similarities.

Region 1. IN, OH, MI, PA, NY,

Region 2. MA, CT, NJ, RI

Region 3. MN, IL, IA, WI, MO

REGION 4. ND, SD, WY, MT

REGION 5. NE, KS, CO

REGION 6. TX, NM, OK

REGION 7. CA, OR, WA, ID, NV, UT

VI. Timeline from Sept. 23, 2008

Late 2008/Early 2009)—make contact with state biologists and directors outside of MAFWA.

May 2009—meet in association with the Midwest Private Lands Working Group (in Illinois—Red Lake Resort east of St. Louis).

Fall 2009—MPSG meeting in ND (with western state participation) to develop pheasant plan draft.

May 2010—(in Indiana w/ Private Lands Working Group) Present first draft of pheasant plan. Seek funding for Plan coordinator.

Meeting Time and Place – Sept. 21-24, 2008 at Old Woman Creek National Estuarine Reserve and State Nature Preserve, Huron, Ohio

Attendance – Stan Kohn (ND), Chad Switzer (SD), Jeff Lusk (NE), Randy Rodgers (KS), Todd Bogenschutz (IA), John Cole (IL), Budd Ververka (IN), Al Stewart (MI), Scott Klinger (PA), Pat Ruble (Wildlife Management Institute), Doug Bensman (Ohio Pheasants Forever), Luke Miller (OH), Dave Scott (OH), and Nathan Stricker (OH).