

# **MIDWEST PHEASANT STUDY GROUP 9<sup>TH</sup> MEETING**

**Hosted by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission**



**Nebraska State 4-H Camp  
Halsey, Nebraska  
October 1-4, 2006**

**MIDWEST PHEASANT STUDY GROUP  
2006 MEETING REPORT**

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State Updates*	
Illinois	
Iowa	
Kansas	
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Missouri	
Nebraska	
North Dakota	
Ohio	
South Dakota	
Wisconsin	

\*Hard copies of state updates are provided to each member state and to the president of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

## **AGENDA**

### **9th Midwest Pheasant Study Group**

*Toward a Cohesive Strategy for Measuring Farm Bill Effects on Pheasants*

October 1-4, 2006

4-H Camp, Nebraska National Forest

Halsey, Nebraska

#### **Sunday, October 1st**

5:00 PM - 9:00 PM - Check-in

7:00 PM - 9:00 PM - Social, libations, and appetizers

#### **Monday, October 2nd**

7:30 AM - Breakfast

9:00 AM - State updates

10:15 AM - Break

10:30 AM - Pheasant responses to CRP disking and legume interseeding in Nebraska -  
Ty Matthews, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

11:00 AM - Grassland bird and invertebrate responses to CRP disking and legume  
interseeding in Nebraska - Lucas Negus, Oklahoma State University

11:30 AM - Logistic and outreach components of mid-contract management - Scott  
Wessel, Nebraska GPC

12:00 PM - Lunch

1:30 PM - Pheasants Forever partnerships in Nebraska - Pete Berthelsen, Nebraska PF

2:00 PM - Pheasant imprinting study - Mark McInroy, Iowa DNR

2:30 PM - Break

2:45 PM - Effects of CP15B grassed terraces on pheasant and grassland bird abundance -  
Randy Rodgers, Kansas DWP

3:15 PM - Does incidental winter grazing warm season buffers affect buffer function or  
wildlife habitat quality? - Randy Rodgers, Kansas DWP

3:45 PM - Break

4:00 PM - Increasing Midwest participation in national quail planning - Jim Pitman,  
Kansas DWP

6:00 PM - Dinner

**Tuesday, October 3rd**

7:30 AM - Breakfast

9:00 AM - Business meeting

9:30 AM - Do we need a national pheasant conservation plan? (Introduction) - Scott  
Taylor, Nebraska GPC

10:30 AM - Break

10:45 AM - Measuring USDA conservation program effects on pheasants - Todd  
Bogenschutz, Iowa DNR

12:00 PM - Lunch

1:00 PM - Biofuels discussion - Todd Bogenschutz, Iowa DNR, and Kurt Haroldson,  
Minnesota DNR

2:30 PM - Break

2:45 PM - Do we need a national pheasant conservation plan? (Conclusion) - Scott  
Taylor, Nebraska GPC

6:00 PM - Dinner

**Wednesday, October 4th**

7:30 AM - Breakfast and Adjourn

## **MIDWEST PHEASANT STUDY GROUP**

### **2006 Meeting Summary**

The group held our 9th biennial meeting October 1-4 at the Nebraska 4-H Camp near Halsey, Nebraska. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) hosted this year's meeting, the theme of which was "Toward a Cohesive Strategy for Measuring Farm Bill Effects on Pheasants." The 4-H Camp offered all food and lodging on-site, and its "off the beaten path" location provided a distinct lack of distractions apart from the wildlife and scenery of the Nebraska Sandhills. States in attendance included Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Representatives from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), Pheasants Forever (PF), and the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) were also present.

The meeting began Sunday evening with a mixer, giving the attendees a chance to get reacquainted and meet new members. Refreshments were provided by Nebraska Pheasants Forever and were much appreciated at the end of an unusually warm day.

Monday morning began with a welcome and introductions. State representatives then provided updates on pheasant populations, harvest, habitat trends, research, and special programs in their respective states since the last meeting (see attachments).

Next, Ty Matthews, a graduate student at UNL, presented results of his study on pheasant responses to disking and legume interseeding of CRP fields in northeastern Nebraska. Nesting radio-tagged pheasant hens strongly preferred treated portions of fields, and nest success in treated areas was slightly higher than in untreated areas. Ty is still working on discerning habitat preferences during brood-rearing.

Lucas Negus then presented his work on songbird responses to disking and interseeding on the same northeast Nebraska study areas used by Ty. Lucas performed the work as a graduate student at Oklahoma State University. Disked and interseeded fields had higher overall bird abundance, nest densities, and species richness than reference fields, but abundance effects varied by species. Responses were greatest the year following treatment and diminished quickly thereafter. Lucas recommended that portions of fields should be treated and untreated to maximize their utility for the entire suite of grassland birds.

Scott Wessel (NGPC) then provided some details about how the disking and interseeding work on private land in northeast Nebraska was accomplished. All field work was contracted and overseen by NGPC and PF staff at no cost to the landowner. Noxious weed control was also conducted by NGPC when necessary, and severe infestations caused suspension of further disking and interseeding work in some areas. A number of well-attended field tours have been given to landowners, media, USDA staff, and other natural resource professionals to show the effects of the treatments on vegetation, insects, and wildlife. Scott believed this type of mid-contract management was beneficial, but required a significant amount of money, staff time, and outreach effort to be successful.

After lunch, Pete Berthelsen (Nebraska PF) detailed the variety of partnerships his organization is involved with in Nebraska. Among these, Youth Mentor Hunts, the CRP-MAP walk-in hunting program, the Focus on Pheasants suite of projects, and cooperatively funded Farm Bill Biologist positions housed at county USDA service centers have been particularly successful in attracting partners to deliver education and habitat benefits. The personal relationships built through these partnerships also make it much easier to find cooperative solutions when future conservation opportunities arise.

Next, Mark McInroy (Iowa DNR) presented his work imprinting pheasant chicks on humans for research purposes. This technique has been used previously with game bird chicks as a way to sample invertebrates in different habitats (captive-hatched chicks are led through habitats and the food items they eat are quantified by one of several methods). Mark's work is testing ways of imprinting chicks that are not as time-consuming as previously described methods, as well as exploring observation methods that minimize the effects of human presence and movement on invertebrate availability to chicks.

Randy Rodgers (Kansas DWP) then presented results detailing the effects of CP15B grassed buffer strips within wheat fields on grassland bird abundance in western Kansas. Randy and his coauthors found pheasant, bobwhite, and dickcissel abundance was markedly higher in fields containing buffers than in nearby fields without them. Despite significant benefits of within-field grass strips in terms of wildlife abundance, soil and water conservation, and elimination of the mechanical difficulties of farming over terraces, landowners have been reluctant to enroll land in this practice due to USDA's requirement to protect the buffers from grazing. Randy presented results of an enclosure experiment suggesting cattle often had little effect on the buffer vegetative structure and subsequent pheasant use. He concluded a relaxation of USDA's rule concerning grazing of buffers would likely increase enrollment and be a large net gain for wildlife.

Monday concluded with a discussion led by Jim Pitman (Kansas DWP) and Pat Ruble (WMI) concerning increasing participation by Midwestern states in the upcoming revision of the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative. The Midwest agency directors recently pledged their support of this effort. Several states felt there were communication problems in the initial development and evaluation of the plan between the Southeast Quail Study Group and quail biologists in the Midwest. Jim and Pat said they would help facilitate better communication this time around.

Tuesday began with the business meeting. Minutes from the 2004 meeting were approved unanimously. Michigan forwarded \$127.69 from the 2004 meeting to Nebraska; Scott Taylor (NGPC) will provide a full financial report for the 2006 meeting in a few weeks. [Note: Final balance was \$123.25.] Ohio volunteered to host the 2008 meeting; this offer was accepted unanimously.

Scott Taylor (NGPC) then spoke about the potential need for a national pheasant conservation plan. Plans have been or are being developed for bobwhites, prairie grouse, ruffed grouse, woodcock, and western quail, as well as for many other groups of game

and nongame birds. Some of these planning efforts have garnered support for new Farm Bill provisions to target specific needs. A national pheasant plan could be used to help justify crafting USDA practices we think would be most beneficial to pheasants, and set some specific habitat and population goals. However, a plan would also take a considerable amount of time and effort to put together correctly, let alone to implement. The group discussed the merits of this idea, and resumed discussions following the rest of the day's presentations.

Todd Bogenschutz (Iowa DNR) then led a discussion about measuring the effects of USDA conservation programs on pheasants. Measuring environmental benefits is part of the USDA's recently announced Conservation Effects Assessment Program. The FSA commissioned Western Ecosystems Technology, Inc., to quantify the pheasant response to CRP. Their results suggested a 22% increase in pheasant counts made by Breeding Bird Survey observers for every 4% increase in CRP within a landscape. Others have used different approaches to quantify positive CRP-pheasant relations. Although the USDA may have "the number" they need to make policy decisions, several in the group thought we needed a more refined approach to quantify pheasant responses, because responses vary with CRP type, configuration, location, and management. Todd suggested using the Natural Resources Inventory sampling framework to quantify pheasant and other wildlife responses at a large scale.

Todd and Kurt Haroldson (Minnesota DNR) then presented some information about biofuels production and its potential effects on land use in general and future CRP management and sign-ups in particular. Although corn ethanol production has ramped up quickly over the past several years, CRP acres have remained relatively stable. However, some of USDA's projections suggest a need for more corn acreage to support demand and have seemingly identified CRP lands as a potential source of those acres. With government support, private companies are developing cellulosic ethanol production systems, which will be much more efficient than current grain ethanol systems. Some may wish to harvest the permanent cover on CRP lands as feedstock for these systems, but the industry has indicated mixed-species stands are not ideal. Companies are now developing plant varieties (transgenic switchgrass among them) that maximize biomass production; it's predicted that the southeastern states will be the national leaders in efficiently producing this biomass.

The group then revisited the discussion on a national pheasant conservation plan. Although there were reservations expressed by some, the group unanimously voted to recommend to MAFWA that a plan would be beneficial and that our group would be willing to help develop it. We then discussed what should be included in the recommendation (see attached).

The group departed Wednesday morning.

Scott Taylor, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission  
2006 Chair, Midwest Pheasant Study Group



## MIDWEST PHEASANT STUDY GROUP

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

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### Recommendation No.1

#### Pertaining to:

The development of a national pheasant conservation plan.

#### Recommendation:

The Midwest Pheasant Study Group (MPSG) recommends the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) support the development of a national pheasant conservation plan. We further recommend the MPSG be the lead organization in developing the plan. If a plan is deemed necessary, non-MAFWA states and provinces within the pheasant range should be invited to participate as full partners in the process.

#### Justification:

National conservation plans have been or are being developed for a wide range of upland game birds (e.g., bobwhites, prairie grouse, ruffed grouse, woodcock, western quail) with support from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and its regional counterparts and working groups. While the habitat conservation recommendations within some of these plans will likely benefit pheasants and other wildlife, the MPSG believes the long-term conservation of pheasants will not be successful without management tailored to their needs within the highly altered landscapes they inhabit. Pheasants are prime candidates for focused conservation effort given their long-term population declines over much of their range.

Despite being an exotic, pheasants enjoy a level of constituency support rivaled by few other species in the Midwest. We believe a national plan would serve as a rallying point for this constituency and provide substantial momentum toward broad-scale grassland conservation efforts. Unlike many species, pheasants also enjoy an extensive research history detailing their habitat needs, so recommendations within the plan would have a sound scientific underpinning. Thus not only would a plan have wide public appeal, it would have a high likelihood of success if implemented.

Large landscape changes have been the norm in the Midwest over the last century, and technological and political issues on the horizon (expansion of biofuels production, potential loss or modification of CRP, etc.) suggest that pattern will continue. We

believe large-scale pheasant habitat needs should be defined and available to decision-makers who may shape these changes; a comprehensive national plan would serve this purpose well.

Finally, the MPSG believes these benefits will only be realized if significant resources (i.e., funding support for full-time coordinator, additional travel support for staff, commitment to implementation) are invested by MAFWA states. States and provinces outside the membership of MAFWA should also be invited to participate and invest as full partners in the planning effort. Without substantial and widespread support, the conservation opportunities afforded by the plan will be diminished.

**Adopted by:**

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**Midwest Pheasant Study Group  
Halsey, NE  
October 3, 2006**

**Contact: Scott Taylor  
2006 Chair**

## LIST OF ATTENDEES

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## **ORGANIZATIONAL GUIDELINES OF THE MIDWEST PHEASANT STUDY GROUP**

### OBJECTIVES:

1. Provide an informal forum for common management problems concerning the pheasant and associated upland game (where applicable) in Midwest upland/farmland habitats.
2. Stimulate an exchange of information between states on survey techniques, harvest regulations, research, and habitat management.
3. Provide an opportunity to define and set priorities for common research needs and to minimize duplication of efforts among member states.
4. Provide an opportunity to develop cooperative research projects that one state could not address by itself.
5. Act as a source of detailed information on pheasants in the Midwest (and other applicable states) for the public and other resource agencies.

### ORGANIZATION:

The Midwest Pheasant Study Group shall consist of representatives from the member states who, as wildlife biologists, are directly responsible for research and management of pheasants and associated upland game birds. States invited to join the Group are Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Other states are encouraged to participate. The Midwest Pheasant Study Group is sanctioned by the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA)<sup>a</sup>.

### OFFICERS:

The offices of chairperson and secretary shall be filled by biologists from the state selected to host the next meeting. Their term of office shall be from their selection until completion of all responsibilities for their Group meeting. Officers will be selected by the host state with recommendations made by the group. Their responsibilities will include organizing the meeting to be held in their state, selecting a meeting site and dates, arranging for lodging and meeting rooms, formulating an informal program, publicity and meeting announcements to member states, and publication of a meeting summary and updated biologist directory.

### COMMITTEES:

Committees may be selected to investigate specific problems and make recommendations to the entire group. Committees will be selected by the chairperson after reviewing requests for committee action submitted by the membership.

#### MEETINGS:

At each group meeting the date and host state for the next meeting will be decided. Meeting sites will be rotated among member states on a volunteer basis. If no volunteer comes forward, the first member state (proceeding alphabetically) that has not yet hosted a meeting, or the member state with the longest elapsed time period since it last hosted a meeting, will be chosen if agreeable to that state. Meetings will generally be 2-3 days in duration with meeting costs kept to an absolute minimum. A general theme shall be selected for each meeting; site chosen should enhance the selected topic. Field trips are encouraged to investigate management practices and/or research projects.

Notice of arrangements for the meeting shall be distributed to member states at least 4 months in advance to allow time for securing out-of-state travel authority and preparation of presentations/status reports.

#### MEETING AGENDA:

The program shall be informal with ample time for open discussion. Each state shall submit a written report on hunting regulations and harvest, population surveys and trends, new research and management projects, university research, and any other topic that the state representatives deem important. Also, the chairperson may invite guest speakers to present reports on the selected theme of the meeting or other topics that may be of interest to the group. Short field trips may be utilized to point out areas of special interest to the group.

#### ATTENDANCE:

To enhance an atmosphere of total participation and exchange of ideas, the attendance shall be limited to 40 persons. The chairperson will be responsible for limiting the size of the meeting to that number. Forty seats will be allocated in a manner that allows the 11 non-host states to send a maximum of 3 individuals apiece, the host state is allowed 5 seats, and 2 seats will be available for national-group representatives such as Pheasants Forever and Quail Unlimited. If pre-meeting registration indicates that some states will not send their full allotment, the chairperson can delegate unfilled seats to the host state or to states requesting extra attendance. Persons invited by the host state to participate in the program would not be counted toward the allotment.

#### BUSINESS MEETING:

The agenda will include a short business meeting. Topic of discussion will include selection of the next host state, date of the next meeting, future topic(s) of interest,

selection of officers, committee reports, and any other information pertinent to the operation of the group.

MEETING SUMMARY AND MINUTES:

The secretary of the group shall be responsible for preparing a summary of topics discussed at the meeting to persons attending and any other organization or agency making a request. The meeting summary shall contain a synopsis of information presented and items covered at the business meeting, including committee reports. Any written reports submitted at the meeting shall be included as well as a list of persons attending the meeting and their addresses. Group chair will provide a copy of the meeting summary to the president of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies<sup>b</sup>. Duplication of status reports and related material to be placed in the meeting summary shall be the responsibility of member state representatives and adequate copies must be turned in at the meeting. Funds for distribution of the meeting summary and other materials will be furnished by the host state.

<sup>a</sup>Revised at the 2004 meeting by unanimous vote.

<sup>b</sup>Revised at the 1996 meeting by unanimous vote.

Previously revised at the 1993 meeting.