

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Memo: Agenda Item # 11

Date: June 23, 2015

Subject: Presentation on Pheasant Summit Action Plan

Presenters: Tom Landwehr, Commissioner, DNR

Greg Hoch, Prairie Habitat Team Supervisor, DNR

Kevin Lines, Pheasant Action Plan Coordinator, DNR

Background:

On December 13, 2014, Governor Dayton convened a Pheasant Summit in Marshall, Minnesota. This Summit was attended by the Governor, the commissioners of the departments of Natural Resources and Agriculture, staff from multiple federal and state agencies, and 250 hunters, conservationists, farmers, and ranchers. It was Governor Dayton's desire that this group, representing a diversity of interested Minnesotans, could help forge a plan to restore pheasant populations in Minnesota and ensure that future generations can participate in Minnesota's rich pheasant hunting tradition.

The resulting Pheasant Summit Action Plan presents those ideas and establishes a measureable 4-year time-frame to increase and improve pheasant habitat and opportunities for hunting. However, it should be understood that almost all management actions taken to benefit pheasants will also benefit waterfowl, grassland songbirds, and other grassland dependent wildlife.

Attachments: Pheasant Summit Action Plan-Executive Summary Draft

PHEASANT SUMMIT ACTION PLAN

Executive Summary

1. Ensure in each county of the pheasant range, at least three, 9-square mile habitat complexes where the landscape meets the goal of 40% permanent nesting cover and focus management efforts into those complexes meet these criteria.

Large blocks of habitat increase nesting success – the most important limiting factor for pheasant populations. Using GIS and current land cover data, we will identify the best places for pheasant production, and focus management efforts to meet habitat requirements throughout the year.

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

With 95% 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.

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 them determine which program(s) are best suited to their land.

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

Increasing the base of public lands, will both help increase the habitat base for grassland wildlife and create more opportunities for hunting and other forms of outdoor recreation.

5. 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 all tools that can increase the quality of pheasant habitat.

6. Develop and implement a comprehensive riparian buffer program

Buffers, perennial vegetation adjacent to waterways, are important tools to prevent erosion into state waters. However, buffers can also provide habitat benefits for wildlife. Promoting the existing buffer program and expanding to additional waterways can provide dual benefits to surface water and wildlife.



7. Increase roadside management to optimize pheasant habitat.

While driver safety has to be a 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 (WIA) program in the pheasant range in Minnesota.

Minnesota has been using a one-time legislative appropriation as well as competitive grants from the NRCS to support and fund the WIA program. Without additional federal funding, the program cannot be sustained.

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

An electorate that is knowledgeable about the values and needs of grassland habitat will be supportive in 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 the agricultural part of the state than there have ever been. Minnesota needs to continue and expand habitat based research and monitoring on pheasants and other grassland wildlife to ensure long-term sustainability.