

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

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GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
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## MATTERS OF OPINION



**Terry Steinwand**  
Director

So far this winter we have received a well-deserved reprieve. While we have a couple of months to go, it will still seem mild compared to the past few winters.

Thanks to the mild weather, there has been a tremendous upsurge in ice fishing across the state. Good access has certainly contributed to that, but the great fishing in almost every water body is the primary reason for the interest. The last time we experienced good ice fishing started in the mid-1990s when a variety of new waters arose from the arrival of wet conditions starting in summer 1993. We're seeing it again and will reap the benefits for years to come before each lake settles into what it will eventually become as a fishery.

In past issues of *North Dakota OUT-DOORS*, I occasionally talked about hunting and fishing with my children. Those experiences have provided some of the best memories, which will stay with me forever. I have a series of drawings on my office wall, each done by one of my children, which remind me of those outings. While I'm not sure what Superman and his X-ray vision have to do with hunting, I do remember one of my kids giving such a drawing to me after a weekend adventure outdoors. I'm not so sure it wasn't because I saw something he didn't see, or he simply thought I was a "superman" at the time.

Another of those pictures depicts a mallard in flight and I specifically remember when that one was drawn. My son was about 11 and we'd gone duck hunting for the first time and he was absolutely amazed at the beauty of a drake mallard, and it became his goal to shoot one. I don't believe he achieved the goal that particular year, but

has since done so many times.

The first drawing I received from my oldest son, who at the time had better artistic talent than I'll ever have, is one of the more memorable for me. He was 8 at the time and I decided to take him deer hunting. We were sitting on a knoll on the afternoon of opening day and a buck came out of a cattail slough and stood, waiting for me to shoot. I did – twice – and the deer dropped. I turned around and my son wasn't there, but instead running down the hill like a whirling dervish with arms and legs flailing in an effort to get to the deer. I don't remember his exact words, but I don't think I've ever seen him that excited. And the picture on my wall is pretty accurate, so I know he remembered it, too.

The point of all this is that we have precious little time to mold our children into who we would like them to be. My life has revolved around the outdoors, specifically hunting and fishing. It's an appreciation I wanted to hand down to my children. None of us have the time to do all the hunting and fishing together that we'd like, but when we do, it's another special memory for the future.

I can remember every fish caught, and deer, duck, gopher, pheasant and a variety of other animals that we've taken over time. It was never about who caught the largest or who shot the biggest, at least not to me. It was about spending time together and passing on a tradition. If you know someone who doesn't have the same opportunities as you, please take the time to introduce them to something that will foster a lifetime of memories – the great North Dakota outdoors.

*Terry Steinwand*

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PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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### Front Cover

Wild turkeys aren't native to North Dakota, yet these big birds are found today across the state where habitat is suitable. Efforts were made as early as the 1930s to introduce turkeys to North Dakota, but it wasn't until the 1950s that populations started to take hold.

Photo by Mike LaLonde, Bismarck



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# DRAWING

## for Fewer Deer Licenses

By Jerry Gulke

The results of the 2011 deer drawing reflect a lower deer population. After three difficult winters and several seasons of generous hunting opportunities, 109,950 licenses were made available to hunters last year, or nearly 40,000 fewer than the all-time high in 2008.

As North Dakota's deer population increased in the 2000s – due in large part to an abundance of Conservation Reserve Program acres and an unprecedented decade or longer run of mild winters – license application patterns changed. For a number of years, almost all units had antlerless whitetail licenses remaining after the first lottery drawing. Understanding this, more and more hunters applied for a buck license as a first choice and doe license as a second choice. Or, they didn't select a doe license at all, knowing many of the state's 38 deer hunting units would have antlerless licenses remaining.

Drawing a buck license in 2011 wasn't easy. Of the 75,000 applicants who applied for a buck license as their first choice, more than 27,000 didn't get what they wanted. In deer hunting units 2A, 2G1, 2J1, 3A1 and 3A3, some hunters did not even draw a doe license in the first drawing. In addition, all doe licenses in units 2G2, 3B1, 4A, 4B, 4C and 4D were issued in the second drawing.

This trend of reduced deer hunting opportunities in North Dakota is expected to continue in 2012. Considering that the Game and Fish Department's 2011 fall mule deer survey indicated the lowest production in more than a half-century, it's only a guess how many, if any, mule deer doe licenses will be available to hunters this year.

It wasn't all that long ago that every hunting unit had doe licenses left after the first and second drawings. Those times, however, are behind us. Hunters in 2012 will need to think about their application strategy and consider applying for an antlerless license as a first choice if they want a deer license in a preferred unit, especially those units listed above.

Only a handful of years ago every hunting unit had antlerless licenses remaining after the first and second drawings. Those times, wildlife biologists say, are behind us.

**JERRY GULKE** is a Game and Fish Department information technology coordinator.

# 2011 Deer Lottery Results

Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2011 deer drawing.

		POINTS										
LICENSE TYPE		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OVERALL	
1	A Any Buck	74.2	98.3	100							77.2	
1	B Any Doe	99.1	100								99.1	
2A	A Any Buck	17.1	41.8	64.5	66.7	100					32.4	
2A	B Any Doe	25	63.5	88.2	100	100					38.3	
2B	A Any Buck	71.3	96.4	100	100	100					75.1	
2B	B Any Doe	98.2	100								98.3	
2C	A Any Buck	68.2	97.7	97.2	100						74	
2C	B Any Doe	98.6	100	100							98.7	
2D	A Any Buck	76.3	98.4	100	100						79	
2D	B Any Doe	96.4	100								96.5	
2E	A Any Buck	35.6	73.4	89.6	85.7	100					49.5	
2E	B Any Doe	96.4	100	100							96.7	
2F1	A Any Buck	100	100	100	100						100	
2F1	B Any Doe	100	100	100							100	
2F2	A Any Buck	45.4	86.3	95.3	100	100					59	
2F2	B Any Doe	97.9	100	100							98.1	
2G	A Any Buck	54.7	89.7	100							62.5	
2G	B Any Doe	98.8	100								98.8	
2G1	A Any Buck	35.9	73.8	89.2	83.3	100					48.8	
2G1	B Any Doe	96.1	100	100							96.4	
2G2	A Any Buck	32.4	64.9	81.4	100						44.9	
2G2	B Any Doe	96.2	97.4	100							96.4	
2H	A Any Buck	29.7	64.5	89	78.9	100					46	
2H	B Any Doe	97	95.7	100							96.8	
2I	A Any Buck	29.1	65.2	82.4	96.2	100					44.6	
2I	B Any Doe	98.8	100	100							98.9	
2J1	A Any Buck	8.5	22.2	32.6	48.4	98.1	100	100	100		23.7	
2J1	B Any Doe	94.3	83.3	100	100	100					94	
2J2	A Any Buck	57	93.5	96.5	100						66.2	
2J2	B Any Doe	96.3	88.2	100	100	100					95.8	
2K1	A Any Buck	13.9	36.6	53.1	66.7	100	100				31.3	
2K1	B Any Doe	98.5	100	100	100			100			98.7	
2K2	A Any Buck	39.1	78.4	95.3	81	100	100				53.3	
2K2	B Any Doe	96.9	100	100							97.2	
2L	A Any Buck	100	100	100	100						100	
2L	B Any Doe	100	100								100	
3A1	A Any Buck	8.2	22.5	37.4	43.6	100					19.4	
3A1	B Any Doe	88.2	88	100							88.6	
3A2	A Any Buck	38.6	78.3	91.5	90.9		0	100			52.6	
3A2	B Any Doe	98.5	100	100	100						98.7	
3A3	A Any Buck	13.7	29.7	48.1	59.5	100	100				28.5	
3A3	B Any Doe	93.5	100	100	75						94.1	
3A4	A Any Buck	46.5	82.2	95.1	100	50		100			57.8	
3A4	B Any Doe	98.9	100	100							99.1	
3B1	C WT Buck	7.9	20.4	28.4	44.1	96.4					20.1	
3B1	D WT Doe	96.5	100	100	100						97	
3B1	E MD Buck	28.6	65.6	84.4	88	100					48.3	
3B1	F MD Doe	95.3	100	100	50						94.4	
3B2	C WT Buck	34.6	78.4	83.3	81.8	100					50.4	
3B2	D WT Doe	94.5	100	100							95	
3B2	E MD Buck	50	81.9	90.9	100	100					63.3	
3B2	F MD Doe	100	100								100	
3B3	A Any Buck	10.3	20.6	38.5	55.3	100					22.8	
3B3	B Any Doe	88.2	87.5	80	100						87.9	
3B3	C WT Buck	80.4	98.9	95.8	100	100	100				83	
3B3	D WT Doe	97.7	100	100	100	100					97.8	

		POINTS										
LICENSE TYPE		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OVERALL	
3C	A Any Buck	2.9	7.8	21.3	25	83.3	100				11.7	
3C	B Any Doe	89.7	100	100		100					91.6	
3C	C WT Buck	66.2	93.5	98.1	100	100					74.6	
3C	D WT Doe	100	100	100							100	
3D1	A Any Buck	19.3	36.1	54.3	90	100					29.9	
3D1	B Any Doe	94.6	100	100							94.9	
3D1	C WT Buck	89.6	100	100	100						91.7	
3D1	D WT Doe	100	100	100							100	
3D2	A Any Buck	13.8	40.1	65.7	79.3	100			100		31.4	
3D2	B Any Doe	96.7	100		100						97.1	
3D2	C WT Buck	93.1	91.3	100	100						93.1	
3D2	D WT Doe	100	100	100							100	
3E1	A Any Buck	21	48.2	74	76.7	100	100				36.9	
3E1	B Any Doe	95.8	100	100							96	
3E1	C WT Buck	80.9	100	100	100		100		100		83.3	
3E1	D WT Doe	100									100	
3E2	A Any Buck	28	60.9	82.3	94.7	100					45.2	
3E2	B Any Doe	94.2	100	100	100						95	
3E2	C WT Buck	96.7	100	100	100	100					97.1	
3E2	D WT Doe	100	100								100	
3F1	A Any Buck	34.5	74.4	91.9	100	100	100				51.4	
3F1	B Any Doe	96.7	66.7								93.9	
3F1	C WT Buck	99.3	100	100	100						99.4	
3F1	D WT Doe	85.7			100						87.5	
3F2	A Any Buck	16.9	48.5	75	74.2	100	100	100			37.9	
3F2	B Any Doe	98.4	100	100	100						98.6	
3F2	C WT Buck	97.9	97.1	88.9	100	100					97.7	
3F2	D WT Doe	83.3									83.3	
4A	C WT Buck	18.4	46.4	68.3	71.4	100					34.6	
4A	D WT Doe	95.2	100	100							96	
4A	E MD Buck	4.8	14	22.6	25.7	98.5	100				19.2	
4A	F MD Doe	88.9	100	100	100						91.4	
4B	C WT Buck	53.8	85.5	90	100	100					62.9	
4B	D WT Doe	100									100	
4B	E MD Buck	2.5	6.4	15.6	20.9	88.3	100				13.7	
4B	F MD Doe	92.9	90.9	50	100	100					91.7	
4C	C WT Buck	82.8	100	100	100	100					85.3	
4C	D WT Doe	100									100	
4C	E MD Buck	1.8	4	6.8	9.8	62.9	88.1	100	100	100	13	
4C	F MD Doe	89.4	100	100							91.1	
4D	C WT Buck	97.4	92.9	75	100	100					96.3	
4D	D WT Doe	100	100	0							88.9	
4D	E MD Buck	5.2	12.6	18.8	30.6	98.1	100				18.2	
4D	F MD Doe	90.2	90	100							90.7	
4E	C WT Buck	100	100	100							100	
4E	D WT Doe	100	100								100	
4E	E MD Buck	11.5	25.6	52.3	54.2	100			100		24.4	
4E	F MD Doe	89.3	100	100							90.3	
4F	C WT Buck	98.2	100								98.4	
4F	D WT Doe	90									90	
4F	E MD Buck	33.1	69.2	100	100	100					46.2	
4F	F MD Doe	100	100								100	
MUZ	C WT Buck	0.6	1	2	4.2	29.7	47.3	75.2	33.3	100	8.8	
MUZ	D WT Doe	100	100	100	100	100	100				100	

## Reviewing the Lottery

Most years there are questions concerning how the lottery system works. This makes sense since new hunters join the deer hunting ranks every year. Using deer as the example, though pronghorn and turkey work the same way, here is a reminder.

If you fail to draw your first license choice in any given year, but apply within the next two years, you receive a bonus point. You do not have to apply in the

same unit, or for the same deer type, to qualify. You get an additional bonus point each year you apply and do not receive your first license choice, as long as you have applied in the first drawing at least once in the previous two years.

You receive additional chances in the drawing for each bonus point accumulated. For points one through three, you are entered in the drawing two times the number of points you have. So, if you have two points you would get four additional

chances to be drawn, compared to a person who got his or her first choice the previous year. If you're both competing for the same license, you have five chances, he or she has one.

When you accumulate four or more points, the number of additional chances is determined by cubing your bonus points. So, when you have four points, you will be in the drawing 64 additional times, 125 times if you have five points, and so on. Bonus points are accumulated as long as



## 2011 Turkey Lottery Results

*Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2011 spring turkey drawing.*

		POINTS										
LICENSE		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OVERALL	
02	S	100	100	100							100	
02	IS	100									100	
03	S	100	100	100							100	
03	IS	100									100	
04	S	76.5	100	100							76.9	
04	IS	100									100	
06	S	100									100	
13	S	100	100								100	
13	IS	100									100	
17	S	100	100	100							100	
17	IS	100									100	
19	S	100	100								100	
19	IS	100									100	
25	S	93.8	100								94.1	
25	IS	100									100	
27	S	65.6	98.1	100							71.4	
27	IS	100									100	
30	S	100	100								100	
30	IS	100									100	
31	S	100									100	
37	S	46.8	85.1	100	100	100		100			55.4	
37	IS	100									100	
40	S	69.8	95.8	100							73.4	
40	IS	100									100	
44	S	100	100								100	
44	IS	100									100	
45	S	100	100	100							100	
45	IS	100									100	
47	S	100	100		100						100	
47	IS	100									100	
50	S	42.5	81.9	100							54.4	
50	IS	100									100	
51	S	98.8									98.8	
51	IS	100									100	
53	S	30.9	60	0							34.3	
53	IS	100									100	
98	S	63	100	100							64.6	
98	IS	100									100	
99	S	100	100								100	
99	IS	100									100	

*Percent of applicants who received their first choice of license in the 2011 fall turkey drawing.*

		POINTS										
LICENSE		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	OVERALL	
02	F	79.1	100	100							83.9	
03	F	100									100	
04	F	82.3									82.3	
06	F	100									100	
13	F	100									100	
17	F	70.6	100								70.9	
19	F	100									100	
25	F	100									100	
27	F	66.3									66.3	
30	F	100	100								100	
31	F	100									100	
37	F	89.3	97.4	100							89.9	
40	F	100	100								100	
44	F	100	100								100	
45	F	100									100	
47	F	100									100	
50	F	99.2	100	100							99.3	
51	F	100									100	
98	F	100									100	
99	F	100	100								100	

### 2011 Lottery Results

- 109,950 deer licenses available, down from 116,775 in 2010.
- 2,500 mule deer buck licenses were available in 2011, down from 3,200 in 2010. Hunters who applied for these licenses increased from 9,892 in 2010 to 10,145 in 2011.
- 80,271 people applied for deer licenses (not including gratis, non-resident, youth or muzzleloader), up from 76,072 in 2010.
- 75,423 hunters applied for buck licenses as their first choice, but less than half of the licenses available, 48,400, were buck licenses. Nearly 39,000 buck licenses were available in the drawing after 15,744 gratis and 1,093 nonresident licenses were deducted.
- All buck licenses were issued in the first unit/first choice drawing except for unit 3E1.
- Applicants could have had as many as 18 bonus points, but the highest number of points in the 2011 drawing was 10.
- 3,361 applicants had four or more bonus points, and 1,806 drew their first license choice.
- Applicants who applied for a mule deer buck license accounted for 20 percent of applicants with four or more bonus points and those applying for a muzzleloader buck accounted for an additional 69 percent.
- The number of people with four or more bonus points increased again in 2011 from 2,912 to 3,361. This reflects the lower number of licenses available in the drawing. Allowing hunters to sit out a year without losing their bonus points also contributed to the increase.
- A muzzleloader buck license was again the most difficult to draw, with almost 12 times more applicants than licenses. A mule deer buck license in unit 4C was second, with more than seven times as many applicants as licenses.
- There was no pronghorn season in 2011.
- 6,720 spring turkey licenses were available in 2011, while 6,540 were available in 2010. The number of applicants in 2011 increased from 6,832 to 7,077.
- The number of fall turkey licenses available in 2011 decreased from 5,775 to 4,830. The number of applicants also decreased from 4,116 to 2,928.

you do not draw your first license choice and apply in the first drawing at least every other year. You do not receive bonus points in years you do not apply.

Each drawing is still random, but the more bonus points you have, the better your odds. When you receive your first license choice, you lose your bonus points and start over. Bonus points can only be earned, or used, in the first drawing for each species in each year.

The license lottery consists of four separate drawings, one for each choice on the application. First, we hold a drawing for the first unit/first deer choice. When those have been issued, we draw for the first unit/second deer choice, then the second unit/first deer choice, and finally the second unit/second deer choice.




# LIFE *after* CRP

MAINTAINING  
RING-NECKED  
PHEASANTS IN  
A CHANGING  
LANDSCAPE

A GUIDE FOR LANDOWNERS AND PHEASANT ENTHUSIASTS



 NRCS Natural Resources  
Conservation Service

NDSU

HETTINGER  
RESEARCH EXTENSION CENTER





# LAND AND WILDLIFE IN TRANSITION

Wildlife responds to habitat changes. As land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program expires and is converted to other uses, many wildlife species, especially those that rely on grassland for nesting, brooding and winter cover, will decline in numbers.

The ring-necked pheasant and other grassland nesting birds are a case in point. The CRP is recognized as a main reason for much improved pheasant populations in North Dakota and other Great Plains states in the last two decades. Loss of CRP acreage will mean declining pheasant numbers across their entire North Dakota range.

An expiring CRP contract, however, does not have to mean a void of pheasants on a piece of ground. This special publication is designed to provide private landowners/operators with guidance on ways to manage expired CRP acres for profitability, while maintaining at least some benefits for pheasants and other wildlife.

In addition, practices that preserve or create habitat on expiring CRP acres may also fit into management plans for landowners who don't have CRP acres. Many options come with attractive financial incentives from state and federal agencies or private organizations.

While North Dakota may not in the near future see an annual pheasant harvest approaching a million roosters as it did in 2006, there is still opportunity to provide habitat for these popular upland game birds.

This special publication is designed to provide private landowners/operators with guidance on ways to manage expired CRP acres for profitability, while maintaining at least some benefits for pheasants and other wildlife.

CRAIG BIRRE



CRAIG BIRRE



With more than 800,000 acres scheduled to expire by the end of 2012, and varying amounts in the years to follow, North Dakota's CRP base will fall to around 1 million acres by 2015, down from more than 3 million acres in 2006.

Various management scenarios can provide pheasant habitat on land with an expiring CRP contract, ranging from maintenance of idle grassland, to retaining grass for livestock grazing or haying, or returning it to raising crops.

Managing for maximum habitat without the annual income from a CRP contract is not likely a practical alternative for many

landowners, but retaining or creating at least some habitat is an option that many landowners would consider if it's cost effective and makes sense for an operation.

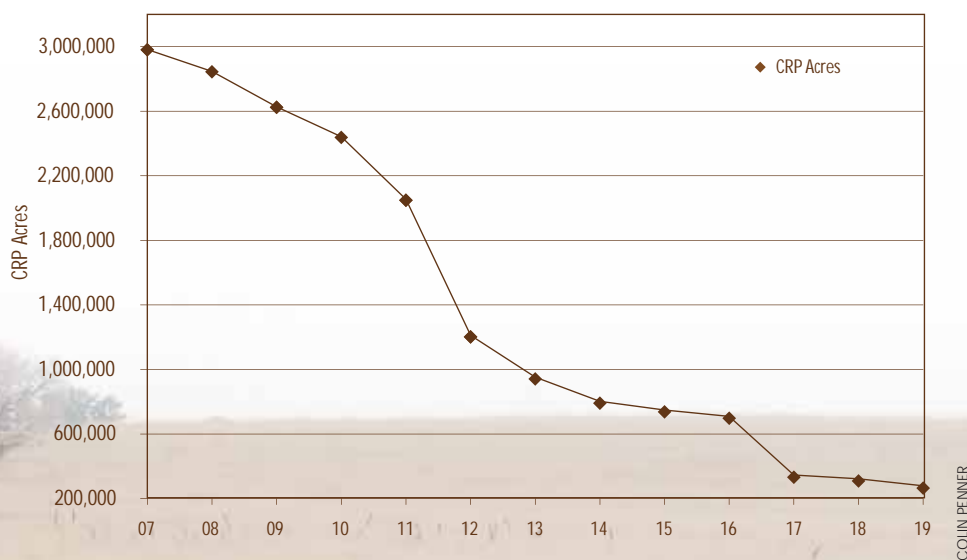
A good first step is an inventory of expired or expiring CRP acres to determine existing habitat quality and future land use goals. Pheasants and other wildlife will respond differently to varying management scenarios.

An ideal landscape for pheasants consists of about 70 percent cropland (approximately 30 percent row crop and 40 percent small grains) and 30 percent hayland or grassland, of which 10-15 percent is undisturbed nesting cover.

This combination of food and cover provides the needed pheasant life requisites. A drinking water source is not a life necessity for pheasants as they get sufficient water intake from dew, frost and food sources.

Greatest pheasant mortality occurs from winter exposure and predation, rather than hunter harvest or dry conditions.

## NORTH DAKOTA CRP PROJECTED LOSSES



COLIN PENNER

CHRIS GRONDAHL



# PHEASANT HABITAT FROM SEASON TO SEASON

Throughout the year pheasants use the following cover and food types:



CRAIG BIHRLE

**Nesting cover -**  
Dense herbaceous cover with good overhead concealment from avian predators. Pheasants are six times more likely to nest in undisturbed grassland than in woody areas such as tree rows.

**Brood-rearing cover -** Consists of vegetation with forbs (food sources) that is relatively open near the ground, to allow easy travel by chicks while still providing overhead concealment from avian and other predators.



CHRIS GRONDAHL





CRAIG BHIRLE

**Food** - Waste grains, forbs and grass seeds, fruits and leaves. Adult pheasants also consume insects in spring and summer, and young birds survive almost entirely on bugs their first five weeks after hatching.

**Roosting/escape cover** - Dense tall shrubs and hedges or dense herbaceous cover, cattail wetlands, weed-grown fence lines and small farmland woodlots. These areas of dense vegetation located near foraging sites are also necessary as escape cover.



CRAIG BHIRLE

**Thermal or winter cover** - Dense herbaceous and woody vegetation provide thermal and protective cover during winter months.



CRAIG BHIRLE

Note that none of these cover types need to include trees. Pheasants will safely roost in shrubs. Trees provide habitat for avian predators that can destroy nests and kill adult pheasants.

Which of these cover types are close by? Pheasants do not typically travel great distances for their habitat needs, so if any required habitat element is not available within a quarter- to half-mile radius, that's an area for consideration.

Habitat inventories should include soil types. Soil surveys are available on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service website at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>.

Knowing soils is an important step in the inventory process. For example, soil limitations could mean that woody habitat is not an option. Or, soil limitations could determine future crops and conservation practices necessary to control erosion and retain soil quality achieved while the land was idled in the CRP.

A decision on how to use expired CRP land depends on variables. Whether future use is for growing crops, livestock grazing, hay production or something else, it's possible to retain or create valuable pheasant habitat without sacrificing productivity.



# LAND USE AND PHEASANT

Unlike some grassland nesting birds, pheasants cannot rely solely on one cover type for their entire life requisites. They use edges and a variety of habitats in close proximity.

Pheasants need grasslands for nesting habitat. Undisturbed grass is preferable, but they will also use grazed or hayed areas. Grassland proximity to winter cover, such as shrubs and brush or cattails around wetlands and along waterways, is also important. Pheasants can also find food in cropland, particularly in fall and winter.

Undisturbed herbaceous habitat, such as CRP grass, can also provide early or mild winter cover, but often fills in with snow during typical winters.

Expired CRP grasslands can still provide pheasant cover even though they are grazed or hayed. Habitat quality for nesting and brooding cover is determined by grazing and haying management strategies.

While grazed or hayed grassland is more beneficial to pheasants than cropland, landowners with expiring CRP acres may not have use for those options. Well managed cropland can still benefit wildlife without affecting the producer's bottom line.

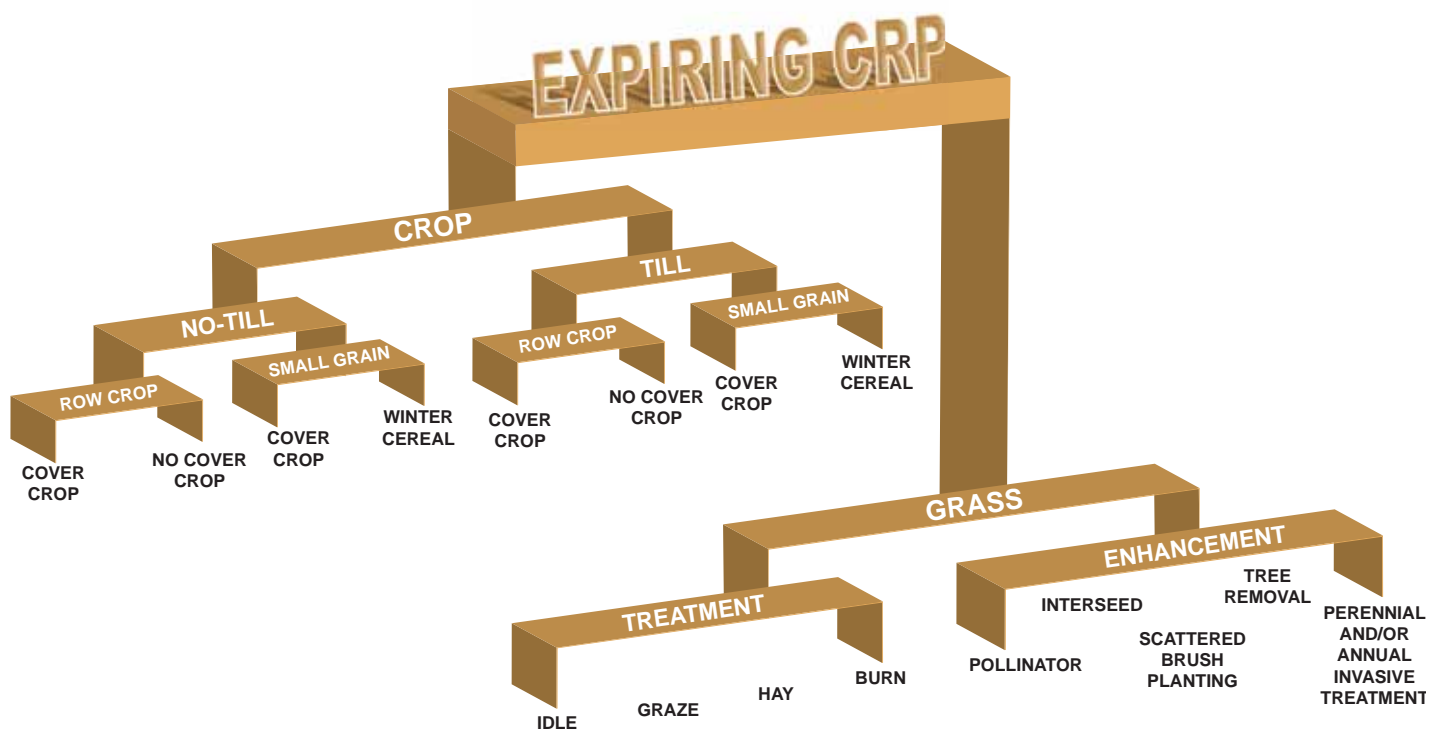
## Grassland Ecology

Native or introduced grasslands require management to invigorate and maintain desirable species. Native grasslands evolved with disturbances such as grazing by native bison, pronghorn and elk, and periodic fire.

These frequent disturbances maintained the natural diversity of warm- and cool-season grasses and forbs. Elimination of fire and changes to grazing frequency following European settlement significantly altered the natural disturbance regime. This, coupled with introduction and invasion of nonnative species such as Kentucky bluegrass, smooth brome, crested wheatgrass, sweet clover, annual bromes, Russian olive and the spread of some native woody species (i.e. Rocky Mountain juniper), has, in some cases, dramatically altered the composition and health of native grassland habitats.

Left idle, excessive plant litter accumulates on native and tame grassland. This alters some ecological processes including reducing the amount of sunlight reaching plant crowns near the soil surface. This shading shifts the competitive advantage from native species to shade-tolerant invasives such as Kentucky bluegrass and smooth brome. Unchecked, the invaders take over more and more territory and reduce grass and forb diversity, meaning lower quality habitat for pheasants and ultimately, greatly reduced overall plant and wildlife species diversity.

The management practices described in the following pages can help maintain grass and forb diversity.





# HABITAT QUALITY

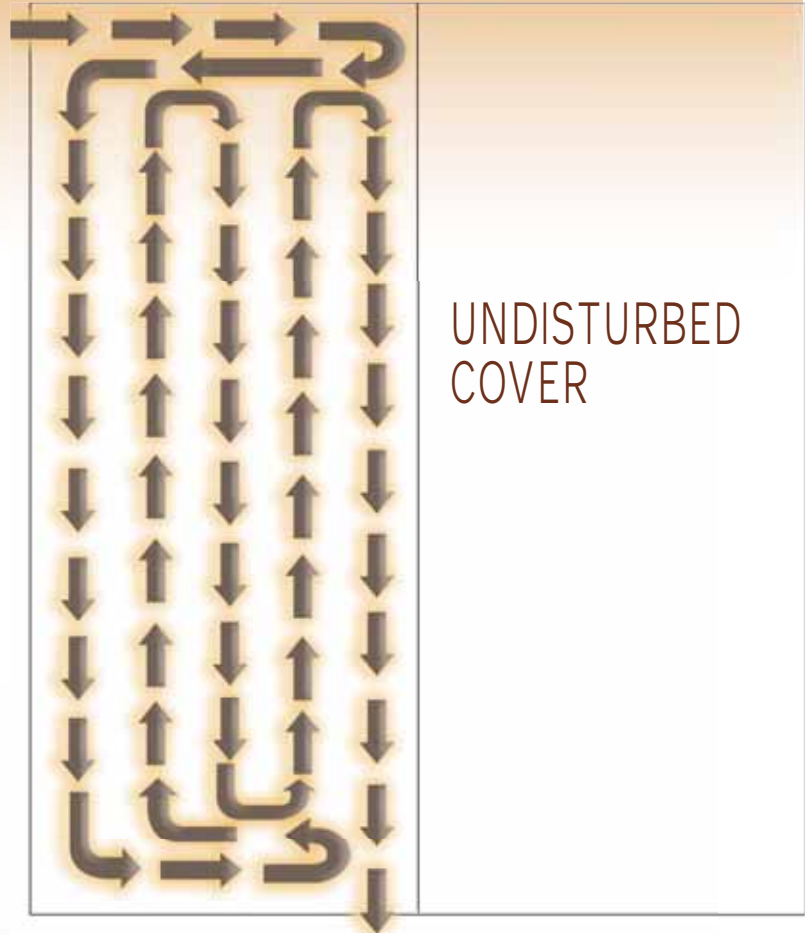
## Managing Hayland

Producers can hay one-third of a designated nesting area annually and still provide optimal wildlife nesting opportunity. No matter the amount, delaying haying until August 2 each year yields best results for limiting mortality of pheasant nests and broods, while July 15 is an alternative date if hay quality is a priority.

If better hay quality and quantity is the desired goal, and a producer would like to hay up to 50 percent of dedicated nesting acres annually, following a haying rotation (see accompanying illustration) is a beneficial compromise. In this scenario, 50 percent of the field is cut annually, with each area cut two years in a row, then switching to the other area for two years. This helps ensure good residual cover for nesting most years, while usually increasing hay quality.

Haying toward the idle acres allows pheasant broods and adults to escape to the unhayed area instead of getting trapped in a small strip in the middle of the field. Under this scenario, the producer hays the ends of the field first, then works back and forth toward the unhayed nesting cover.

If haying is used to manage and invigorate a grass stand, rake and remove dead grass (litter) from the soil surface. Using a heavy harrow or other light ground disturbance post-haying will allow more sunlight to reach the soil surface to encourage forb growth.



## Haying Diagram

Hay west half on years  
1/2, 5/6, 9/10

Hay east half on years  
3/4, 7/8

## Prescribed Grazing

Grazing systems should match stocking rates to annual growing conditions and control the frequency, intensity and timing of grazing within each pasture. Grazing systems should allow for adequate recovery between grazing events – 45 to 65 or more days for native grassland, 25 to 35 or more days for introduced grassland depending on growing conditions – to improve plant vigor and provide for residual cover for nesting and winter cover for resident wildlife.

Changing deferment periods for each pasture from year-to-year will improve plant vigor and provide undisturbed nesting cover in at least a portion of the grazing unit. Well-managed grazing systems can provide a diverse, vigorous grass and forb community rich in insect populations to provide a protein source for chicks and fledglings.

Multiple pastures within a grazing system allow the manager to control the amount of time any one pasture is grazed or rested. As the number of pastures within the rotation increases, managers have more options to better meet habitat objectives.





## Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burning can help reduce unwanted woody vegetation and invasive plant species. This practice is most productive on native grasses, but also benefits forbs and legumes, such as wildflowers, alfalfa and clovers.

Prescribed burns reduce plant litter, stimulate new plant growth, and increase forage quality in haying/grazing operations. They must be properly planned and timed correctly, however, to effectively reduce target species.

Early season burns (late April and early May) are typically most effective for suppressing Kentucky bluegrass, while late spring burns (late May and early June) are preferable for suppressing smooth brome grass. Effectiveness of summer and fall burns for suppressing these species is still unknown, though some anecdotal evidence appears to support fall burning for Kentucky bluegrass suppression.

Following a burn, monitoring for noxious weeds is necessary. Prescribed burns every 3-5 years is a typical rotation, though annual burning is sometimes necessary to manage native grassland heavily invaded by smooth brome grass or Kentucky bluegrass.

## Fencing

Properly constructed and maintained permanent and temporary electric fences are effective in controlling livestock within a well-managed prescribed grazing system. These types of fences are more cost effective, require less maintenance, provide more management flexibility and are less disruptive to wildlife movements than conventional three- or four-barbed wire and woven wire fences.



KEVIN KADING

*Above and below: Prescribed fire can help improve forage quality in grazing systems, and it can also stimulate beneficial plant growth in undisturbed areas. While there is always a risk that prescribed fire in spring will destroy some nests, pheasants will typically re-nest and long-term benefits will outweigh short-term losses.*



CRAIG BIRBLE





## Trees as Pheasant Habitat

Although pheasants benefit from edge habitat found in agricultural landscapes with grass, cropland, cattail-ringed wetlands, woody cover and weedy patches, they need relatively undisturbed herbaceous areas for nesting cover.

Trees, however, are sometimes detrimental if developed without a plan. Trees are often added to herbaceous cover with the goal of enhancing habitat, but studies in South Dakota and Colorado have found that pheasant nesting success was lower in and near shelterbelts.

In addition, location of some trees and shrubs could reduce food plot use. Studies in South Dakota indicate pheasants used tree cover only at the end of a severe winter, (a one- in 10- year event) though this use may have prevented total mortality.

In other winters, hen pheasants were much more likely to use cattails, tall grass and food plots for winter cover.

Studies indicate that woody habitat is important for escape cover and good winter cover during severe weather conditions. However, trees should be limited or not included at all in woody habitat plantings. In addition, narrow tree belts (1-4 rows) can become death traps as they collect snow and can bury and suffocate pheasants looking for thermal cover.

Linear tree plantings also provide travel lanes for mammalian predators and perches for avian predators such as crows, magpies and various birds of prey. These predators can reduce nesting success and increase hen mortality.

If woody habitat is planted, it is best to locate these plantings on the edge of nesting habitat, rather than in the middle, to reduce predator influence.

Woody habitat should consist of scattered shrubs around the perimeter of nesting habitat to provide escape cover, but not create travel lanes for ground predators or perch sites for birds.

If other winter cover is not available, wide blocks of woody habitat can be planted in compatible soil. These block plantings should be at least 15 rows wide, comprised of predominately suckering shrubs. Consider native suckering shrubs that bear fruit for late fall and early winter food sources. If trees are used, select evergreen species that provide thermal cover.



*Pheasants do roost and rest in trees (above), but elevated branches also provide favorable perches for birds of prey such as this red-tailed hawk (left). Todd Porter, Mandan (below) used silverberry in his planting to yield low woody cover without the potential for high perches for birds of prey.*



CRAIG BHIRLE

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CRAIG BHIRLE



# MANAGING CROPLAND WITH



CRAIG BIRNLE

*No-till cropland management can leave behind waste grain that pheasants and other wildlife can use as a food source in fall, winter and even the following spring. Tall stubble can also provide some cover until it fills with snow.*

Pheasants and other wildlife species cannot survive solely in a cropland dominated landscape. Other vital habitat types must be available to meet certain demographic requirements. However, cropland can be important for wildlife and provide many benefits if managed properly. These benefits vary depending on the season, species, type of crop, mechanical disturbances, and availability of food, water and cover. The best management of cropland for wildlife incorporates no-till practices with high residue crops and diversified cropping rotations.

Pheasants use cropland as a winter food source, and they may find both food and cover during breeding season. Some birds nest in cropland after a crop is planted. When this occurs, exposure to predation and chemical applications is a concern.

Nests and young are vulnerable to mechanical disturbances during nesting and brood-rearing seasons. Winter cereal crops (winter wheat, etc.) are attractive to some nesting birds because of early green-up and fewer disturbances in spring. Mature or taller crops like sunflowers, corn or wheat can provide cover in the summer/fall but do not provide nesting habitat. Planting spring crops in close proximity to nesting cover will maximize benefit to pheasants.

## Cropland Management Strategies

The following practices can improve potential wildlife habitat within cropland:

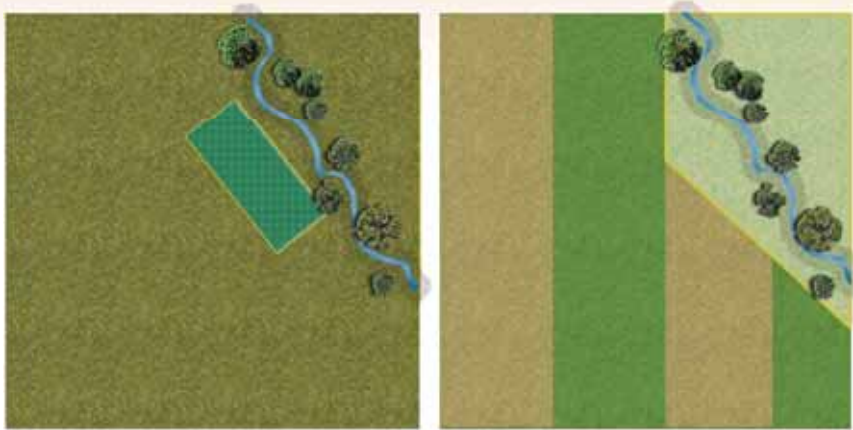
1. Avoid fall tillage. No-till or minimum tillage practices leave weed seeds and waste grain on or near the ground

that can provide food for wildlife. Avoid mechanical activities and heavy pesticide use in spring. Inversion tillage destroys foods, cover and nests, destroys soil structure and opens fields to erosion.

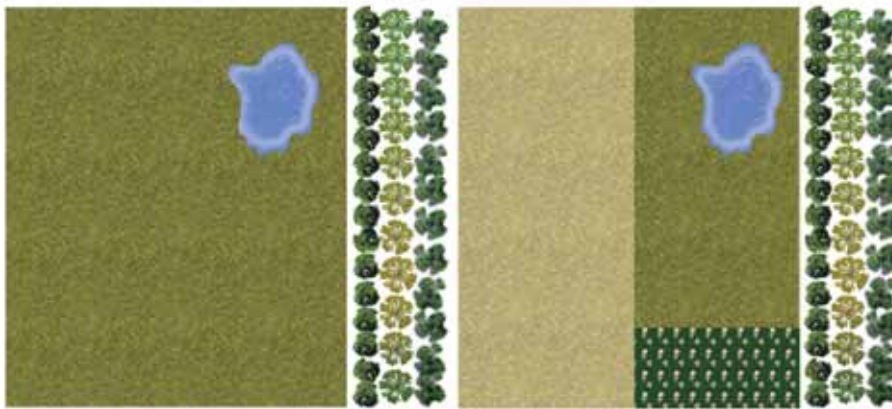
2. Avoid cropping wetlands and areas directly adjacent to riparian corridors. A grass buffer around wetlands and adjacent to riparian areas provides much needed cover in intensively farmed areas. Cultivation near wetlands promotes surface evaporation, increasing salt concentrations at the surface. Over time, salinity may reduce productivity, eventually making the land unfit for crop production. Buffers can be planted, maintained or allowed to naturally regenerate.
3. Avoid burning cattails in and around wetlands. Cattails are preferred winter habitat for pheasants, providing thermal protection from bitter winds and heavy snow. Cattails within cropland provide ideal winter cover in close proximity to available food (waste grain).
4. Manage saline areas by planting deep-rooted perennial forage species on recharge areas of saline seeps to use excess water before it reaches discharge areas. This will also reduce evaporation and prevent salts from reaching the surface. Perennial vegetation manages salinity and provides nesting cover for pheasants.
5. Provide food on conventional crop fields by leaving several rows or strips of standing crops adjacent to permanent winter cover.



# PHEASANT HABITAT IN MIND



The diagram on the left depicts a parcel of CRP containing a perennial stream with natural woody cover and a food plot. After the CRP expired the landowner returned a portion of the CRP acres to crop production. In this scenario, grass cover was maintained around the riparian area. The food plot was removed because a portion of the area went into crop production. The green areas in the diagram at right were converted to alfalfa. The crop and alfalfa strips will be rotated every 4-5 years and cover crops are seeded on the cropland after harvest of winter cereals.

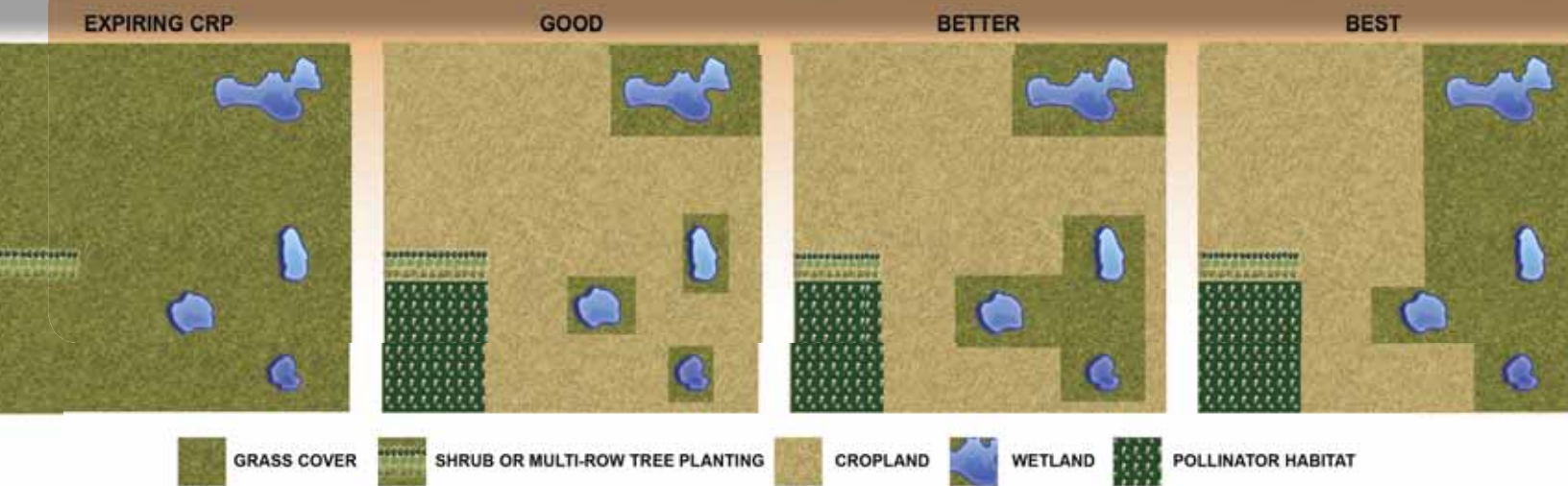


The diagram on the left shows a 160-acre parcel of expiring CRP that contains a wetland and is bordered by a multi-row shelterbelt. On the right is that same parcel after the CRP contract expired and the landowner returned a portion of the area to crop production. The landowner re-enrolled the right side of the parcel back into a general CRP contract, and converted an area to high diversity pollinator habitat as an enhancement. The cropland was returned to production using no-till. The area now provides all pheasant habitat requirements throughout the year.

6. In landscapes that are intensively farmed, provide nearby nesting and roosting habitat, such as planted cover (CRP and other set-aside grasslands) and wetlands. Include undisturbed or low-disturbance areas in the landscape to balance out more intensively managed areas.
7. Provide properly distributed food plots to prevent unnatural concentrations of wildlife, which may lead to starvation, disease outbreaks or competition with domestic livestock food supplies. Food plots in blocks minimize accumulation of drifting snow, and should be located within one-quarter mile of winter cover, to minimize pheasant exposure to the elements when traveling to and from feeding.

8. Heavy herbicide and insecticide use destroys many valuable wildlife food sources. Excessive or improper pesticide use in crop fields and adjoining areas will not only kill target weeds or insects, but also kill beneficial nontarget plants and insects.
9. Proper crop rotations can improve soil health and provide plant and insect diversity. Including winter cereals in a crop rotation system provides pheasants with green cover in which to nest in spring, and provides habitat through harvest. Fall-planted crops also break up field work throughout a farming operation because they mature earlier than spring-planted small grains. Other crops, such as flax, canola and sunflowers, attract insects and can serve as good brood-rearing habitat if insecticide use is limited. Corn and soybeans serve as escape cover during summer and provide a food source during late fall until snow gets too deep.
10. Consider incorporating alfalfa into a cropping system with small grains on a 4-5-year rotation. Delay haying until July 15, or leave an undisturbed block each year to allow for successful nesting. Wildlife-friendly haying operations reduce loss of nesting hens.
11. Recognize that genetically modified crops might reduce wildlife benefits due to fewer weed seeds and insects.
12. Managing crop residues can benefit resident wildlife. Tall stubble can provide food and thermal cover, and depending on snowfall, the benefits could last throughout winter. Combines equipped with stripper headers, which leave stubble height greater than 12-15 inches, provide the most benefit to pheasants while maximizing topsoil moisture retention.





The diagram on the left is an example of 160 acres of CRP prior to expiring. These CRP acres were dominated by smooth brome, providing nesting cover but not much other pheasant habitat. The area contains wetlands and a multi-row tree planting. After the CRP contract expired the landowner decided to return some of the 160 acres to crop production, but still wanted to maintain habitat for pheasants. The diagrams to the right are three examples of returning idled CRP acres to production while still maintaining some pheasant habitat. The wetlands and adjacent uplands were re-enrolled in a continuous CRP practice and brood-rearing (pollinator habitat) was added using a general CRP signup. The far right example provides optimum habitat retention while returning land to crop production. Nesting cover is maintained by retaining a large block of grass, brood cover is enhanced by pollinator habitat, and protected wetlands maintain winter cover.

## COVER CROPS

Cover crops can provide wildlife food and cover. Taller crops provide obvious escape and thermal cover. Cover crop seed mixes used to improve soil health provide high protein forage for species such as deer and pronghorn. The diversity of plants used in mixes also adds to insect diversity for young birds. Cover crop mixes, which include species in the *Brassicaceae* family, such as turnip and radish, as well as soybeans, field pea, corn, sunflower, millet and sorghum, will provide quality seed for winter food if left standing to maturity.

Cover crops, although not a new concept, are gaining popularity throughout much of the Upper Great Plains. A true cover crop is planted for soil protection or enrichment between main crops. However, crops planted for a variety of purposes are sometimes called cover crops, regardless of when they were sown.

Known cover crop benefits include retention of soil moisture, building soil structure, preventing soil erosion, reducing chemical inputs, enhancing nutrient cycling, suppressing weeds, creating pollinator and beneficial insect habitat, and as forage for livestock.

As cover crops increase in popularity, the number of plant species incorporated into use has increased substantially. In general, four crop types are associated with cover crops.

These four cover-crop types include:

1. Cool-season grasses
  - a. Annual
  - b. Biennial/winter annual
2. Warm-season grasses
  - a. Annual
3. Cool-season broadleaf
  - a. Annual
  - b. Biennial
  - c. Leguminous
  - d. Nonleguminous
4. Warm-season broadleaf
  - a. Annual
  - b. Leguminous
  - c. Nonleguminous



Cover crops can improve soil health and also provide winter food and cover.

Cropping systems can be tailored to enhance wildlife needs. A no-till cropping system, which includes high crop diversity from the four major crop types, provides a basic starting foundation. Cover crop combinations can address wildlife resource concerns; a partial list may include vertical structure, pollinators and food supplies.

Diverse cropping systems include opportunities or windows to seed cover crops. Specifically, after early harvested crops like pea, wheat, triticale and corn silage; or as season-long cover crops.

Cover crop seeding alternatives include:

1. Predominately cool-season annuals seeded in April and May – season long
2. Predominately warm-season annuals seeded in June and July – season long



3. Predominately cool-season annuals seeded after an early harvest
4. Predominately cool season biennials seeded after an early harvest.

Cover crops can provide suitable habitat for pheasants and other grassland nesting birds if they have adequate structure and are relatively undisturbed during nesting. Since pheasant nesting generally starts in late April, a biennial planting of cover crops may best meet hen requirements.

Species to consider include those that generally grow well in the fall and are likely to maintain rigidity and stature throughout a severe winter. Plants that are easily laid over by snow will not provide the needed structure the following spring.

A cool-season planting that is relatively undisturbed for an entire growing season may provide nesting cover for pheasants, provided it is seeded early enough. While a cool-season mix planted in late April would provide little nesting cover for first nest attempts, it might provide adequate nesting structure later on for hens that lose their first or second nest attempts to predation or abandonment.

## INTERSEEDING

If expired CRP land is a monoculture with one type of plant such as smooth brome grass or Kentucky bluegrass, or lacks legumes or forbs, consider interseeding adapted, native and/or introduced legumes into the field.

Benefits of establishing interseeded legumes or forbs can include improvements to soil health, increased forage production, enhanced diet quality for pheasant chicks, and better habitat for wildlife.

Interseeding the same or different grass species into existing grass stands has not proven successful. An onsite investigation to determine feasibility of interseeding is required. Timing of precipitation, soil structure, soil moisture at time of seeding, species selection, seedling vigor, seeding technique and competition from established species are all factors that determine the level of success.

Vigor and density of an existing stand will determine moisture available for new seedlings. Soil surface conditions, including amount of bare soil surface, litter amounts (thickness and extent), and presence of a root mat (most common with Kentucky bluegrass), directly affect the potential to obtain necessary seed/soil contact.

For existing native grass mixes, interseed native forbs. Species selection depends on soils. Most native forbs can be used for interseeding. Alfalfa and sweetclover are the most successful forbs to interseed into tame grass such as brome grass. Seeding rates for adapted legume/forbs should be one-half the recommended full seeding rate for the species.

If multiple legume/forb species are interseeded, then the total seeding rate for all species should not exceed 50 percent.

Site preparation and seeding technique depend on the site. To reduce competition to seedlings, an application of Glyphosate could help suppress smooth brome grass stands. Other techniques

Both biennial and season-long cover crops can also provide secure brood cover if proper species are used and they are managed to maintain structure and attract insects. The key is to include multiple species of flowering plants that differ in flower color and timing of flower production.

Again, insects are the primary diet of young chicks and insects are attracted to flowering plants. Insects also provide a valuable source of protein for adult pheasants any time they are available, particularly for hens during nesting.

If fall or early winter food for pheasants is a concern, incorporate small grains into cover crop mixtures regardless of when the crop is planted. Species that produce a lot of seed, and are of higher stature can provide valuable food well into winter, even in times of heavier snow.

While most cover crops do not provide secure winter cover, sorghum-sudan grass does have enough structure and vertical cover to protect wintering pheasants from heavy snow and prolonged cold.



*Interseeding alfalfa (purple flowers in background) into tame grass can help improve pheasant nesting and brood-rearing potential.*

CRAIG BHIRLE

such as heavy harrowing when plant litter is dry (days with extremely low relative humidity) may reduce litter cover and help ensure seed to soil contact.

Seeding equipment needs to penetrate the soil surface place the seed at the proper depth and ensure good seed to soil contact. Seeding should take place in early spring or late fall to provide seedlings the most favorable conditions. Late summer seeding is not recommended due to moisture limitations. If management includes grazing, defer for at least one growing season to allow for seedling establishment.



# FOOD PLOTS

All pheasants need food.

Sometimes, particularly during difficult winters, humans feel the desire to help wildlife out, but this usually does more harm than good. Pheasants can become dependent on artificial food sources, and supplemental feeding congregates birds in a small area, often attracting predators and increasing predation risk. Supplemental feeding can also draw birds away from winter cover, exposing them to the elements and increasing mortality.

Alternatively, planted food plots provide a long-term food source and quality habitat with more natural feeding distribution to reduce the risk of disease transfer.

The most common food plots include annual crops such as sunflower and corn, though diverse annual crop mixtures are becoming more popular. These multi-species plantings not only provide a food source, but can provide brood rearing habitat and winter cover.

## Food Plot Recommendations

Annual food plots can enhance pheasant survival by providing readily available food and improving the habitat complex. Food plots are especially important on land planned to provide a winter or early spring food source.

Many areas with quality winter habitat lack a nearby food source. Food plots can reduce mortality from weather and predators when placed in close proximity to winter protection. Food plots can also provide good nutrition for hens prior to egg laying.

The recommended food plot size is one-half acre to five acres. One pheasant needs approximately one bushel of corn over a five-month period. Food plot size should correspond to the estimated population of wintering wildlife.

Consider multiple food plots where adequate winter cover exists.

Locate food adjacent to or within one-quarter mile of winter cover, on the leeward side of protected areas. If that isn't practical, snow traps can reduce the amount of drifting into a food plot.

No-till planting is recommended to minimize erosion.

Planting should take place early enough to ensure plant maturity.



CRAIG BIRBLE

Adequately prepare the seedbed to ensure food plant establishment.

Food plots will be undisturbed until seedbed preparation the following spring, except for cultivating or spraying to control weeds.

Avoid planting food plots in a location that will increase wild-life activity near livestock feed supplies, newly planted trees or major roads and highways.

Food plots established away from winter cover will expose pheasants to weather elements and predators.

ANNUAL FOOD PLOTS		
Crop	Rate	Date*
Corn	12,000 -18,000 plants/acre	May 20
Sunflower (oil type)	12,000 -18,000 plants/acre row crop 4-6 lbs./acre solid-seeded	June 5
Millet (Proso)	15-30 lbs. /acre	June 25
Sorghum (grain)	15-30 lbs./acre solid-seeded	May 25
Barley	60-90 lbs./acre	May 31
Buckwheat	50-60 lbs./acre	May 20
Flax	35 lbs./acre	June 10
Oats	50-80 lbs./acre	May 31
Rye	60-90 lbs./acre	Sept. 30
Wheat	60-90 lbs./acre	May 31
Sudangrass	15-30 lbs./acre solid-seeded	May 20
Lentil	40-70 lbs	May 20
Winter Peas	100-180 lbs./acre	May 20

\*Planting dates will vary with location, the crop variety and weather conditions.



## Perennial Food Plots

Perennial food plots – those that do not require planting every year – provide added dividends for birds, especially those species whose chicks depend on insects for food, like pheasant and sharp-tailed grouse.

Perennial food plots comprised of flowering forbs attract insects and provide food for chicks. These forbs also attract pollinating insects such as bees, which benefit plant reproduction.

Perennial food plots can vary in size and location throughout nesting habitat to provide adequate feeding sites for chicks. Choose sites that are relatively free of noxious and invasive weeds and that have suitable soils.

Timely weed control prior to and during establishment is required. Maintain sites with weed problems weed-free for at least two years prior to planting.

A diverse mixture of native grasses and forbs is recommended, with no more than 25 percent grasses by seed count. A suggested perennial food plot seed mix is listed on this page.

PERENNIAL FOOD PLOT MIX			
Species	Variety	%	Rate PLS LB/AC
Sideoats grama	Pierre or Killdeer	5	0.375
Blue grama	Bad River	5	0.125
Switchgrass	Dacotah	5	0.225
Canada wildrye	Mandan	5	0.375
Green needlegrass	Lodorm	5	0.375
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>25</b>	
FORBS			
<i>(lb./acre rate shown is doubled from percent seed count shown)</i>			
Blanketflower	Northern	5	0.7
Black-eyed susan	Northern	5	0.08
Blue flax	Appar	10	0.76
Yellow cone-flower	Stillwater	5	0.15
Purple prairie clover	Bismarck or Northern	15	1.14
White prairie clover	Antelope or Northern	15	1.17
Canada milkvetch	Northern	10	0.8
Maximilian sunflower	Medicine Creek	5	0.1
Stiff sunflower	Bismarck	5	0.25
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>75</b>	
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	

*Corn next to a tree row is a typical annual food plot, but perennial plantings that include grasses such as switchgrass (left) and forbs like maximilian sunflowers (below left) are beneficial in summer because they attract insects that pheasant chicks need during their first few weeks of life.*



CRAIG BIHRLE



CHRIS GRONDAHL



CRAIG BIHRLE





CRAIG BIRHLE

CRP has been on the landscape since 1986. Wildlife, including ring-neck pheasants, responded and achieved populations not seen since the Soil Bank days of the 1950s and 1960s.

North Dakota's populations of the 1990s and 2000s became new historic highs. Although the guidelines outlined in this document may not provide habitat equivalent to the CRP, they do provide options for landowners to enhance available habitat while maintaining income potential on lands where CRP contracts have expired.

Landowners concerned with pheasant and other wildlife populations should inventory their own and surrounding lands, and rely on a variety of tools to fulfill annual wildlife needs and maintain local pheasant populations.

Information on available resources is available by contacting a local NRCS office, Pheasant Forever biologist or North Dakota Game and Fish office.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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CRAIG BIRHLE



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# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH

By Greg Freeman, Department News Editor



## Spring Light Goose Season Opens

North Dakota's spring light goose season opens February 18.

The spring season is part of an effort to reduce the Mid-Continent Light Goose Population, which has more than tripled in three decades.

Snow geese tend to move through the state fairly quickly in spring, with arrival and departure depending on weather conditions. Snow geese typically migrate through the state in March and early April, but might be earlier this year due to the mild conditions.

Licensing information and regulations are available on the North Dakota Game and Fish Department website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), or by calling (701) 328-6300. The 2011-12 hunting license is still valid for residents. Nonresidents need a \$50 spring license. New Harvest Information Program certification is required for all hunters. Call (888) 634-4798 to register, or visit the Game and Fish website.



CRAIG BIHRLE

*Hunters may find snow geese arriving earlier to North Dakota this year.*

## Nonresident Any-Deer Bow Licenses

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department will have 682 any-deer bow licenses available to nonresidents in 2012. However, pending the final proclamation, antlerless mule deer may not be legal to harvest in a large area of western North Dakota.

The deadline for applying is April 1. A lottery will be held if more applications are received than licenses available. If licenses remain after April 1, they will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis. Applicants can apply together as a party. A separate check is required for each application.

The nonresident any-deer bow application is available at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). The application must be printed and sent in to the Department.

The number of nonresident any-deer bow licenses available is 15 percent of the previous year's mule deer gun license allocation. The Game and Fish Department issued 4,550 mule deer licenses in the 2011 deer gun lottery.



CRAIG BIHRLE

*Immature bald eagle.*

## Record Number of Eagles Counted

The annual midwinter bald eagle survey along the Missouri River from Bismarck to Garrison Dam showed a record number of eagles.

A total of 108 bald eagles were counted, breaking the previous best of 85 in 2008.

The aerial survey, held in mid-January, is part of a nationwide effort to get an estimate of the number of bald eagles wintering in the lower 48 states. All survey routes across the country are run at the same time to avoid counting birds twice.



## Record Waterfowl Numbers

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual midwinter waterfowl survey in early January showed 279,000 birds, a record high for the number of ducks and geese wintering in the state.

Mike Szymanski, Department migratory game bird biologist, said an estimated 90,000 Canada geese were observed on the Missouri River, and another 70,500 were scattered on Lake Sakakawea, which was open at the time east of the Van Hook Arm. After summarizing the numbers, a record 190,000 geese were tallied statewide.

A mild, dry fall with record-setting warm temperatures kept the birds here longer than usual, Szymanski said.

In addition to the record number of geese, mallards reached an all-time high as 88,000 were counted statewide, with 31,000 on Devils Lake.

"This year's survey results are a dramatic turnaround from the last three severe winters when less than 36,000 total waterfowl were observed statewide each year," Szymanski said.



CRAIG BIRRE

*Thousands of Canada geese were counted along the Missouri River System during the Game and Fish Department's midwinter waterfowl survey.*

## Earth Day Contest

The State Game and Fish Department's annual Earth Day awareness campaign is accepting entries for design of a 2012 Earth Day patch.

North Dakota students ages 6-18 are eligible to participate. The deadline to submit entries is March 15.

The Department will announce a winner in three age categories – 6-9, 10-13 and 14-18. Each winner will receive a pair of Nikon 8x40 binoculars. The final patch design will be chosen from the three winners.

The winning design will be used on a patch given to members of Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H clubs and any school participating in Earth Day cleanup projects on state-owned or managed lands in North Dakota in April and May.

The patch should incorporate some aspect of Earth Day – celebrated April 22 – or keeping North Dakota clean. It must be round and three inches in diameter. There is a limit of five colors on the patch, and lettering must be printed. Name, address, age and phone number of the contestant must be clearly printed on the entry form. Only one entry per person is allowed.

Earth Day entry and reporting forms are available on the Game and Fish Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov). For more information, email Pat Lothspeich at [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov), or call (701) 328-6300.



*2011 Runner-up;  
Zachery Bristol,  
Stanley, ND;  
Age Category: 14-18*



## Game Wardens Association to Give Scholarship

The North Dakota Game Wardens Association has a \$300 scholarship available for a graduating high school senior entering college in fall 2012 who enrolls in fisheries or wildlife management with an emphasis on law enforcement.

Applicants must be North Dakota residents and have maintained a 3.25 grade point average. The scholarship will be awarded to the student upon proof of enrollment in college.

Applications are available by contacting the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at (701) 328-6604; or email [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov). Applications must be postmarked no later than May 4, 2012.

## Great Lakes Wolf Population Delisted

The recent decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove the Great Lakes population of gray wolves from federal protection might not seem as important in North Dakota as in some other states in the Midwest, but it is significant

nonetheless.

Stephanie Tucker, North Dakota Game and Fish Department furbearer biologist, said this development is important because it means the Great Lakes population has recovered enough to no longer warrant protection by the Endangered Species Act.

“However, the Great Lakes population region delisting only includes the portion of North Dakota east of U.S. Highway 83 and the Missouri River, thus complicating their management status in our state,” Tucker said.

Due to this action, the management of wolves found roaming through the eastern portion of the state will fall back to the State Game and Fish Department under state management guidelines as a protected furbearer. The complicating aspect of the decision is that wolves moving through western North Dakota (west of Highway 83 and the Missouri River) still remain under federal protection because that area falls between the Great Lakes and Rocky Mountain population boundaries.

“Although we do get rare sightings in North Dakota, we don’t have a resident

wolf population in the state, or enough suitable habitat to support one; therefore, we have no plans to allow a hunting season on wolves at this point,” Tucker said. “The upside is that under state management, we now have the flexibility to deal with any issues that may arise with the occasional transient animals moving through North Dakota.”

State law has a provision for landowners to protect their property from depredation by a state-managed furbearer. Therefore, landowners in eastern North Dakota could shoot a wolf posing a threat to livestock. However, west of Highway 83 and the Missouri River, wolves are still an endangered species under stricter federal protection. Subsequently, landowners in that part of the state must first contact proper federal authorities before taking action on their own.

“Our hope is that in the near future, additional delisting action by the Fish and Wildlife Service will address western North Dakota,” Tucker said. “Then the confusion over split management status in our state will be eliminated.”

## Watchable Wildlife Checkoff

North Dakota citizens with an interest in supporting wildlife conservation programs are reminded to look for the Watchable Wildlife checkoff on the state tax form.

The 2011 state income tax form gives wildlife enthusiasts an opportunity to support nongame wildlife such as songbirds and birds of prey, while at the same time contributing to programs that help everyone enjoy all wildlife.

The checkoff – whether you are receiving a refund or having to pay in – is an easy way to voluntarily contribute to sustain this longstanding program. In addition, direct donations to the program are accepted year-round.

To learn more about Watchable Wildlife program activities, contact the North Dakota Game and Fish Department at (701) 328-6300 or email [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov).





# STAFF Notes

## Tofteland, Hastings Get Warden Posts

Jonathan Tofteland, Glenburn, is the new district game warden stationed in Bottineau.

Tofteland received his undergraduate degree in fish and wildlife science from Valley City State University.

Greg Hastings of Jamestown has been appointed the new district game warden

in Cavalier. Hastings received his undergraduate degree in wildlife and fisheries management from Valley City State University.

## Jacobson, Buckley Named Private Land Biologists

Levi Jacobson of Devils Lake and Todd Buckley of Iowa have filled the private land biologist positions in Bismarck and Williston, respectively.

Jacobson has been with the Department as an assistant biologist for energy development, and Buckley previously worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## Baker Hired in Administration

Ashley Baker of Bismarck has been hired as an accountant in the Game and Fish Department's main office. Baker received her undergraduate degree in accounting from the University of Mary.



Jonathan Tofteland



Greg Hastings



Levi Jacobson



Todd Buckley



Ashley Baker



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# back cast

By Ron Wilson



Considering preseason reports of fewer birds, especially in the area we hunt close to home, we spent the pheasant opener in deer camp along the Sheyenne River, sighting in rifles and evicting dirty pigeons from a deer stand built atop four recycled telephone poles.

We ended the season southwest of Mandan on a piece of property with some history and a pair of woolly sentinels tall enough to look me in the eye. Despite bird dogs going nuts in their kennels, the llamas clomped curiously closer and closer as if looking for a handout.

Unlike the resident llamas, my son and I were simply guests for this hunt, riding the coattails of a longtime friend with family ties to the land. He talked of teepee rings to the northwest of where we stood, about how George Armstrong Custer and his men camped nearby en route to historic doings in Montana in the late 1870s, and about how the land was settled before that in the 1860s by relatives several branches up the family tree.

I've hunted the area a handful of times over the years, so I know that the Little Heart River flowed to the south of us, hidden behind hills, tall grasses and rows of trees. Downstream of a Texas crossing where the dogs waded across in October, there's a triangular-shaped wildlife planting that is a sonofagun to get pheasants out of, and is somewhat of a magnet for mule deer that, no matter how many times we've jumped them, seemed so out of place this far from the badlands.

We unloaded coolers, food, gear and bird dogs in the fading light of early January and hustled indoors. While my son and I could have done an about-face and arrived back home in a half-hour,

it's seemed like we were much farther removed than that from what passed as familiar. This was an adventure, bunking in sleeping bags atop strange beds and sitting in a kitchen visiting with people we knew, but knew so little about.

This was one of those trips that was thrown together at the last minute as it became more and more obvious the weather was going to cooperate the last few days of the pheasant season. As cell phone calls bounced between Watford City, Jamestown, Fargo and Bismarck, it was never quite certain

when we'd all meet up, but it was assured we'd be eating steak for dinner sometime after dark.

With temperatures in the 40s, little wind and not even a trace of snow on the ground, it was hard to wrap my mind around the fact that it was the first week of January. There was some discussion when we were watering the dogs between hunts about the last time we were able to hunt this comfortably this late in the season. It was agreed that it had been a while.

As crazy good as the weather was, the hunting was every bit its equal. I've yet to participate in the extreme pheasant hunting scene in southwestern North Dakota, but I've heard the stories, and I imagined this was sort of what it's like.

Pheasants, some getting up at our feet and others well out of shotgun range, flushed in a chain reaction of twos and threes and sixes across the landscape like wonderfully-colored toppled dominos.

Amid the confusion of flushing birds (more birds than we'd seen all season), shouts of "hen" and "rooster" and shots that punched the cloudless January sky more often than feathers, my dogs forgot everything they'd learned, with the youngest leading a straight-line race for the horizon.

It was useless to get mad and unreasonable to stay that way. It was too nice outside to holler at knuckleheads, considering we'd been given a pass on the weather and what could have been.



RON WILSON

**RON WILSON** is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.





BRAD BERGER

## *Pileated Woodpecker*

Doesn't matter the time of year, the pileated woodpecker, a bird about the size of a crow, but much more handsome, can be found in North Dakota.

But not just anywhere. The state's largest woodpecker by a bunch is found most commonly in eastern North Dakota river valleys such as the Sheyenne and the Red, and larger woodland blocks in the Pembina Hills and Turtle Mountains.

Distinguished by its large red head crest, black and white neck stripes, dark body and undulating flight while in the air, the pileated woodpecker prefers mature forests, and relatively undisturbed and isolated areas, like old river oxbows. Then again, these birds are also seen in larger urban areas in eastern North Dakota during winter months where mature trees are found.

Pileated woodpeckers are quite shy, but you know these birds are

around by listening or tramping around the woods looking for signs. The woodpecker's call is an unmistakably loud *tuk-tuk-tuk*, as is the drumming sound made by hammering its bill against trees to claim territory.

A pile of wood shavings at the base of a tree can also give the birds' whereabouts away. The pileated woodpecker uses its large bill to peel bark from trees to catch and eat insects it secures with a long, sticky tongue. The bird also digs large rectangular holes in trees in search of food. Sometimes these holes can be so wide and deep that smaller trees can snap in half.

If you find signs of a pileated woodpecker in the woods, there is a good chance you could encounter the bird on your return as it maintains the same territory year after year.

The pileated woodpecker nests in cavities chiseled out by its strong bill.

It's not uncommon for the bird to create entrance holes in a dead tree 7-8 inches across. The nesting period in North Dakota is typically May, and a clutch contains from three to five glossy white eggs.

Unlike many species of birds, the male woodpecker helps in the incubation process, which lasts about 18 days. After hatching, young are able to fly at about 26 days of age.

It's been said that the pileated woodpecker was the inspiration for the Woody Woodpecker cartoon character that first appeared on television in the 1950s. Today, the animated woodpecker can be found on DVD, while the real bird haunts some of North Dakota's woodlands year-round.

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*RON WILSON* is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.