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## \$20 million, 1.1 million acres

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By BETSY FRIEDRICH |

KEARNEY - Pheasants Forever has big plans in Nebraska, and the Buffalo County chapter of the group plans to get involved.

Drew Larsen, a regional wildlife biologist with PF, spoke to members of the Prairie Hills Chapter at Yanney Heritage Park Monday night about Reload Nebraska, a campaign to build more habitat for the birds across the state.



The goal: improve 1.1 million acres of habitat and raise \$20 million over the next four years.

"It's a huge number, and I know there's a lot of sticker shock when I say that, but you look at all the grassroots campaigns out there and some of the folks we're going to work with to put this together, and this is a very attainable number," Larsen said.

The money will be raised by local chapters across the state and by partnering with organizations such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Audubon Society, he said.

The campaign aims to combat a trend of decreasing bird numbers and acres of habitat across the state by showing landowners how conservation can be paid for with public and private funding.

The pheasant harvest in Nebraska has decreased from about 1.2 million birds in 1959 to only 281,500 in 2007. The number of resident pheasant hunters has decreased from about 100,000 in the mid-1990s to 45,000 in 2006.

"I'm behind this and I plan to be involved in it because of my passion for the habitat," said Mike Mathews, a member of the Prairie Hills chapter of PF in Kearney. Mathews was also a member of the committee that drafted the plan last year.

"I take pictures of flowers, and I love all the bugs. I'm a naturalist, and I also love to hunt, so I'm very passionate about habitat.

"I really think we've got to think outside the box. We've got to do things differently. I think the local banquets are absolutely essential, but we've got to break this threshold. We've got to get the whole state involved and get some real money behind this," he said.

About 20 people attended the meeting Monday night, and several spoke in support of Reload Nebraska.

The key to the campaign is delivering a conservation plan to every landowner in the state showing how

