

The fact that Nebraska's pheasant population is ailing is no secret. While many factors play a role in pheasant population dynamics, quality nesting and brood rearing cover is at the top of the list. In the mid 1980's, the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) provided a much-needed shot in the arm. Nebraska's pheasant population initially increased dramatically taking advantage of the great improvements in nesting cover.

While Nebraska's 1.1 million acres of CRP offer the best opportunity to increase bird numbers, the maximum benefits from the program have often gone unrealized. The original seeding mixtures planted and the successional stage of the grass stands on CRP fields have often advanced without any management, decreasing potential for bird production.

Aging, less productive CRP grass stands are almost the norm with 50% of the grass stands being 13 years or older. Considering upland bird productivity in most grass stands begins to drop off after 5 years, most CRP fields have advanced to a condition where diversity and productivity for wildlife are very low.

A few easy management practices can return CRP productivity for pheasants and quail. This brochure outlines a procedure to maximize CRP productivity.

The procedure of disking and interseeding legumes is an approved practice for CRP. While few habitat benefits for upland wildlife happen overnight, this practice will produce positive results within 1 year.

A Pheasant Prescription

1. Check with NRCS: The landowner or operator must check with the local Natural Resource Conservation Service office to verify the project can be completed without a modification to the conservation plan. If a "Planning Sheet 19" is included in the conservation plan, no modification should be necessary.

2. Selection of Site: No more than 33% of a CRP field can be disked in a given year. Disking can be conducted between the dates of August 1 to May 1.

3. Disking the Field: Disking should be performed to a depth of 3 inches in most cases. The older, more mature the grass stand, the more aggressively you'll need to disk to achieve maximum benefits. Multiple passes with the disk will probably be necessary.

4. Drilling the legumes: A mixture of legumes should be planted at 5 to 10 lbs per acre, depending on the site and soil type. PF has developed several mixtures specifically designed to maximize your results with this effort. These mixtures can be ordered at 308-754-5339 or by visiting www.NebraskaPF.com

5. What to expect: The majority of the benefits will occur after the upgrade is about one year old and the legumes have had a chance to serve as nesting and brood rearing cover. The benefits of your upgrade will last 2-4 years; depending on the type of grass stand you have and how aggressively your disking was performed.

6. Repeat: Be prepared to continue performing a disking/legume upgrade in a different portion of the field each year or every other year.

What can you do?

If the CRP field that you own or hunt displays symptoms of aging, consider taking the six steps of "A Pheasant Prescription".

This prescription should be applied to a different 10-33% of the CRP field each year. You will notice considerable improvements the first year, and if administered correctly, it should result in healthy upland bird populations for the remainder of the CRP contract.

Disking and interseeding legumes on mature CRP grass stands is the single most effective pheasant and quail habitat improvement practice that you can make happen.

If your CRP was hayed or grazed in 2002, now is the perfect time to perform an upgrade. Upgrading just 20% of your field will quickly and dramatically increase its productivity for pheasants and quail.

These contacts can help

Natural Resources Conservation Service:

- Contact your local USDA Service Center.

Nebraska Game & Parks Commission:

- Alliance 308-763-2940
- Basset 402-684-2921
- Kearney 308-865-5310
- Lincoln 402-471-5574
- Norfolk 402-370-3374
- North Platte 308-535-8025
- Website www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildnebraska

Pheasants Forever:

- Cairo 308-485-0154
- Lyons 402-687-2004
- St. Paul 308-754-5339
- Website www.NebraskaPF.com

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A Prescription for Pheasants



The Habitat
Organization