



CRP Habitat Loss Major Contributor to 46 Percent Decline in SD Pheasant Numbers

SD pheasant numbers still tops in nation, but habitat loss is cause for concern

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South Dakota's annual pheasant brood survey results are in, revealing a 46 percent decrease in the pheasants-per-mile index from last year. While the hard winter of 2010-2011 didn't do ringnecks any favors, Pheasants Forever says the more troubling statistic is the 25 percent loss in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage in the state since 2007, a loss that finally appears to be catching up to the state's overall pheasant population.

CRP grassland habitat is essential for pheasant production, and enrollment in South Dakota has declined from 1.56 million acres in 2007 to the current 1.17 million acres. According to the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department, that reduction equates to more than 600 square miles of grassland habitat. Comparatively, pheasant numbers in the state are now 41 percent lower than the average of the past 10 years, a period that represented a modern historical high.

"Even South Dakota, the crown jewel of pheasant habitat and pheasant hunting, is not immune to the devastating effects of large-scale upland habitat loss," says Dave Nomsen, Pheasants Forever's Vice President of Government Affairs and a lifelong pheasant hunter who visits South Dakota each autumn. "We knew this day was coming when important pheasant habitats provided by the cover in Conservation Reserve Program fields were lost," Jeff Vonk, Secretary of the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department, said in his agency's 2011 Pheasant Outlook.

With an additional 500,000-plus acres of South Dakota CRP



Much like pheasant habitat in the Midwest, sagebrush habitat in the western U.S. is rapidly being lost.

land slated to expire in the next five years, Nomsen says it's imperative pheasant hunters and conservationists speak up in support of the heralded land conservation program in the upcoming federal Farm Bill debate. "Right now, the landscape of South Dakota is ground zero for conservation. Anyone who's enjoyed the phenomenal pheasant hunting in South Dakota the last decade can thank the Conservation Reserve Program. Now it's time to give back and let federal policy makers know how strongly we feel about protecting upland habitat." Nomsen added, "Additionally, the use of targeted CRP SAFE acres is part of the solution right now, but unfortunately USDA