
Focus on Wildlife

The most limiting factors in pheasant habitat in Nebraska are nesting cover and winter cover. Lets look at these and other factors in pheasant habitat, which you can improve on your farm or acreage.

Nesting cover needs to be a dense undisturbed plant cover with good protection and escape avenues from predators. No-till wheat stubble, sweet clover, roadside areas, weedy areas, native grass and fence line areas provide good cover if they are wide enough to offer good protection from predators. Delayed mowing until first brood pheasants are grown enough to move freely is a big boost. This is usually early to mid-July in our area. Nesting areas bordering fields are excellent as the field cover provides a brooding area on bare ground beneath the canopy of the drilled soybeans, wheat or milo.

Shrub plantings or thin trees with grass can help in providing an escape area, a loafing area and winter protection cover. Winter cover needs to be stiff and dense enough to hold up snow allowing protection and movement areas under the branches. Some plants which do this well locally are skunkbush Sumac, sunflowers, reed canarygrass, vetchs, contoneaster, buffaloberry, chokecherry, etc.

Loss of fence row areas and waterways is reducing habitat in our area. Buffer strips are helping to improve remaining border areas to streams and wetland areas.

Many people trying to improve game bird habitat have put the land in CRP. This is probably not the best answer. Putting part of the land in CRP can be much more productive. Widening and adding shrubs to borders or blocks and farming the remainder using no-tillage methods will provide a much more stabile habitat area.

Pasture areas can be used intensively and then allowed long periods of recovery affording the pheasants time to complete nesting cycles.

Agricultural production can co-exist quite nicely with improved wildlife habitat if the owner and/or tenant set goals for management of both wildlife and crop production. Income derived from leases for hunting or rights to rent and manage land for both crops and wildlife can enhance both the pleasure of doing this and progress toward the objective.

Several cost-share program options available through NRCS and the Lower Big Blue Natural Resource District as well as planning assistance can aid landowners in reaching their objectives.

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