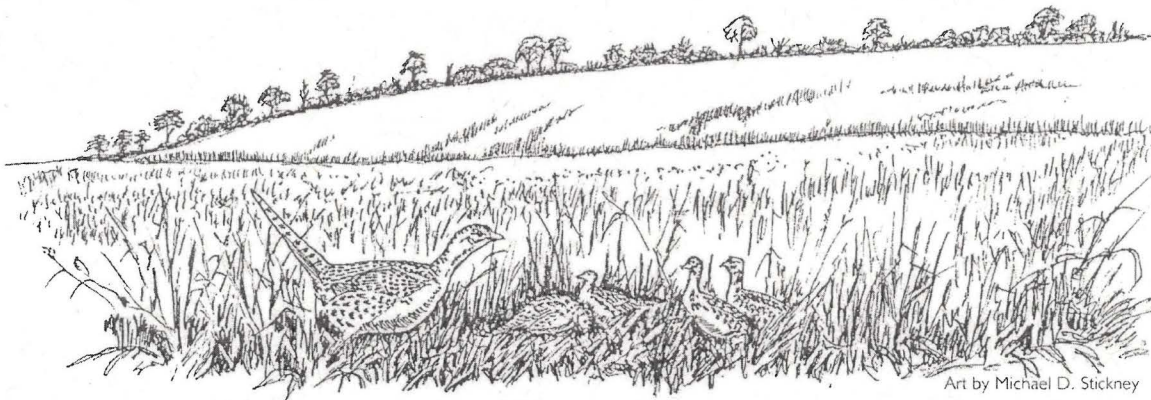
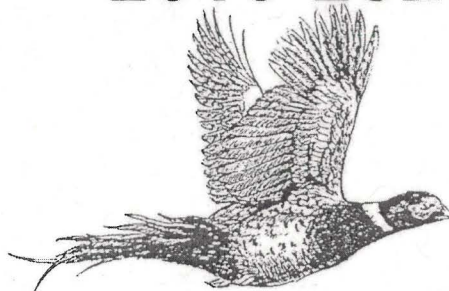




New York State

Department of Environmental Conservation

Management Plan for Ring-necked Pheasants in New York State 2010-2020




Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources

Bureau of Wildlife

January 2010

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Approved:


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1/11/2010



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Mission of the Bureau of Wildlife

To provide the people of New York the opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of the wildlife of the State, now and in the future. This shall be accomplished through scientifically sound management of wildlife species in a manner that is efficient, clearly described, consistent with law, and in harmony with public need.

Goals of the Bureau of Wildlife

- Goal 1. Ensure that populations of all wildlife in New York are of the appropriate size to meet all the demands placed on them.
- Goal 2. Ensure that we meet the public desire for: information about wildlife and its conservation, use, and enjoyment; understanding the relationships among wildlife, humans, and the environment; and clearly listening to what the public tells us.
- Goal 3. Ensure that we provide sustainable uses of New York's wildlife for an informed public.
- Goal 4. Minimize the damage and nuisance caused by wildlife and wildlife uses.
- Goal 5. Foster and maintain an organization that efficiently achieves our goals.

Pheasant Program Vision

To meet the current and future desires of people for pheasant hunting, observation, and educational opportunities within biological constraints and consistent with available funding.

Executive Summary

The ring-necked pheasant is a popular game bird in New York. Pheasants have graced our landscape since 1892 when they were successfully established on Gardiner's Island, located near the eastern end of Long Island. By the 1920s pheasants were successfully established across the state in most habitats that were deemed suitable for pheasants. Originally from Asia, pheasants filled a niche created by the cutting of forests and the formation of an agriculture based society. Today, more than 50,000 hunters in New York pursue pheasants annually and harvest approximately 100,000 birds. These numbers are low compared to 1968 when 272,000 pheasant hunters harvested over 500,000 pheasants.

The wild pheasant population has declined over 90 percent since the heydays of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Numerous factors contributed to the decline, but the loss of fallow grasslands for nesting and brood-rearing, decline in grain farming, and commercial and residential development appear to be the main causes. Nonetheless, pheasant hunting remains very popular and is strongly supported by sportsmen and sportswomen that take to the fields each fall. Much of this support stems from the state pheasant propagation program, which plays an integral part in providing pheasant hunting opportunity. The state propagation program began 100 years ago in Sherburne. All state pheasants are now propagated at the Richard E. Reynolds Game Farm located near Ithaca.

Pheasant management has been guided by two previous pheasant plans, the first adopted in 1979 and the last plan adopted in 1999. This plan represents a revision of the 1999 pheasant plan. It presents a realistic prognosis for wild pheasant management; provides for fiscally responsible use of state propagated birds; offers hunting regulations that are mutually beneficial for wild and propagated pheasants; focuses resources where most needed; and improves distribution of informational and educational materials about pheasants and our pheasant programs. Some of the changes include:

1. *Longer seasons to allow the taking of propagated pheasants released by the state, cooperators in state programs, and private individuals that raise and release pheasants on their own.* Very few released pheasants survive to breed the following year. Therefore, extending seasons provides more days afield for hunters and allows for a higher harvest of released birds.
2. *A longer season in the cocks-only hunting area of western New York.* Extending the season in the cock-only area of western New York should not impact wild pheasant populations in that area. Hen pheasants are still protected and the season closes before mid-winter when hunting disturbance could affect survival of wild pheasants. The longer season is more closely aligned with other states that have cock-only hunting areas. Hunters will have more days to hunt cock pheasants that are released in the area, providing for higher harvest.
3. *Eliminate distribution of birds for National Field Trials.* For many years, the Department provided 600 adult cock pheasants each year for a series of three National Field Trials at the DEC Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area in central New York. Although these birds are not shot during the trials, many are killed by predators and others are flushed off the area. Therefore, they are unavailable to

hunters during the pheasant hunting season. The 600 birds will be better utilized during the regular pheasant hunting season, or during special hunts for youth, people with disabilities, novices, and women. Field trial organizations can still apply to use state land and facilities to host events, but they would be required to buy or bring their own birds. The Department has received additional requests for pheasants for field trials which it has denied.

4. *Terminate the Young Pheasant Release Program in 2011 and increase adult pheasant production by 5,000 birds per year.* Our banding study of young pheasants determined that less than 10 percent of the young pheasants were reported harvested. Adult pheasants released just prior to and during the season may reach harvest rates of 50 percent. Eliminating the rearing and release of 15,000 young pheasants during the summer will allow the Department to produce 5,000 additional adult pheasants in the fall to benefit more hunters and increase the harvest of state propagated pheasants.
5. *Identify a “focus area” in the Lake Plains of western New York where most pheasant habitat management resources would be directed to provide the greatest potential to sustain a wild population.* Most of our habitat efforts for pheasants have been randomly applied over a very large area. Focusing the efforts of many individuals and organizations in one area, a focus area, appears to have the most promise for maintaining or increasing wild pheasant populations.

Other changes include reducing the size of the cocks-only hunting area to reflect a shrinking range where wild pheasants still breed; establishing one or more hunting areas for people with disabilities; requiring the release of Day-Old Pheasant Chick Program birds by December 1st; and releasing at least 10% of our adult pheasant production for the Youth Pheasant Hunt weekends. The plan contains a complete list of goals, objectives and actions to manage pheasants through 2020. To save staff time and avoid duplication in updating the pheasant plan, the new plan does not include a lot of background information about pheasants. If desired, much more detailed information can be found in the previous pheasant plan available by request from DEC regional offices.

Staff involved in preparation of this pheasant plan update concluded that it was a Type II action under SEQR regulations (6 NYCRR 618.2), so no specific environmental assessment was prepared. The Department's pheasant propagation program was specifically described on page 13 of our 1980 programmatic EIS on game species management, and in section 10 of a supplemental SEQR findings prepared in 1994. The program changes described in this updated plan are all within the scope of actions covered by these documents.

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Acknowledgments

Revision of *A Ten-Year Management Plan for Ring-necked Pheasant in New York* began with a charge from the DEC Bureau of Wildlife Guidance Team and the formation of a DEC Pheasant Plan Revision Team (Team). The Team's charge was to assume current level of resources; assume a realistic prognosis for wild pheasant populations; consider simpler or more liberal pheasant hunting seasons; use an open mind and possibly recommend changes from the status quo; recommend specific criteria for allocation of propagated pheasants; use pheasant releases to address special needs and non-traditional groups; clarify the role and legal requirements for private game bird breeders, shooting preserves and others; find out how other states are managing pheasants; and link pheasant management and grassland conservation efforts in selected areas of the state.

Team members researched the various charges and considered a number of issues related to pheasant management. A draft pheasant plan was prepared and released for public comment. A number of individuals and organizations provided comments about the draft pheasant plan. The Pheasant Plan Revision Team would like to thank everyone that took time to review the draft plan and provide comments. We hope it meets your expectations as we guide pheasant management through 2020. Special thanks to Michael Murphy, Bryan Swift, and Emilio Rende, for helping to write and edit the final document.

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Section I

Wild Pheasant Management

Goal 1: Maintain a wild pheasant population in the Lake Plains of western New York, through sound habitat improvement practices and regulations, within land use constraints.

Objective 1.1. Review classification of pheasant hunting areas and continue cock-only harvest regulations in Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) that support sustainable numbers of wild pheasants.

Much of our landscape no longer has the potential to produce wild pheasants. Pheasants are typically a product of agricultural lands that consist of small grains, fallow fields and wetland areas that provide winter cover. The quantity of land in small grain agriculture is greatly diminished since the early 1900s and the state is now mostly forested. Periodic review and update of pheasant hunting areas enables the Department to better manage for wild and propagated pheasant hunting opportunities.

Action 1.1.1. Based on review of recent land cover data, the Breeding Bird Atlas (Figure 1), Grassland Focus Areas (Figure 2), and other current information on pheasant distribution and abundance, revise cock-only hunting regulations as shown in Figure 3.

Objective 1.2. Monitor wild pheasant population trends in the Lake Plains of western New York.

Pheasant population data collected annually provides a historical record; is valuable for documenting long-term trends; can be a predictor of fall hunting success; can be used to set pheasant hunting regulations; and is useful for evaluating response to habitat or land use changes. Pheasants have also been termed an “indicator species,” a species that may reflect the health and status of other agricultural and grassland wildlife.

Action 1.2.1. Annually conduct the Spring and Summer Farmer Pheasant Surveys (Figure 4) begun in 1945. By December 2011, evaluate the merits of continuing or revising the survey to provide the desired information, and implement changes as necessary.

Objective 1.3. Identify a focus area in the Lake Plains of western New York to concentrate habitat management efforts for wild pheasants and monitor the population response.

A number of organizations and individuals have an interest in pheasants and other grassland birds. Efforts to improve habitat have been scattered across our best pheasant range. Developing a focus area to concentrate management efforts would best utilize available resources and determine if increasing the wild pheasant populations was possible under current biological, social, and fiscal conditions. Pooling resources, sharing information, and concentrating efforts are a more realistic approach to sustaining a wild pheasant population in New York.

Action 1.3.1. Using agricultural statistics, land use data, current information on pheasant distribution and abundance, and stakeholder input, select a 10,000-acre or larger focus area in the

Lake Plains (cocks-only hunting area) with the greatest potential to increase wild pheasant numbers.

Action 1.3.2. Work with willing landowners, wildlife managers, farm program agencies (e.g., Natural Resources Conservation Service), private conservation organizations (e.g., Pheasants Forever, Audubon New York) and others to direct all available resources to improve habitat for wild pheasants in the focus area for ten years.

Action 1.3.3. Develop guidelines for creation and enhancement of pheasant habitat and provide technical guidance (e.g., planting mixtures, mowing schedules) and demonstration areas to promote interest among landowners and other potential partners to manage habitat for wild pheasants within the focus area.

Action 1.3.4. Maintain current information on habitat management efforts within the focus area, monitor the pheasant population response to habitat improvements, and prepare an evaluation of all efforts initiated in the focus area by 2019.

Action 1.3.5. Through 2020, provide at least \$10,000 annually for continuation of the Grasslands for Wildlife Program or other habitat improvements within the focus area. The program provides cool and warm season grass seed to landowners that agree to plant and maintain fallow grasslands for pheasants and other grassland wildlife. By December 2011, prepare an evaluation of the Grasslands for Wildlife Program 1999-2009.

Objective 1.4. Provide technical assistance for the development of federal agricultural programs that may significantly affect pheasant populations.

History has shown that pheasant populations across the United States have fluctuated based on federal agricultural programs. Programs most beneficial to pheasants are those that set aside large tracts of fallow grasslands in long-term contracts, such as the Conservation Reserve Program. State wildlife agencies are often in advisory roles during farm program development and have the opportunity to suggest rules and guidelines to positively influence pheasants and other wildlife.

Action 1.4.1. Communicate directly with agencies responsible for the development of federal agricultural programs and with DEC members on the Natural Resources Conservation Service State Technical Committee.

Objective 1.5. Participate on teams or working groups interested in pheasants and other grassland bird species.

Quite often organizations share many of the same interests in wildlife and would benefit from collaborative efforts to meet desired goals and objectives. An example might be Audubon New York and Pheasants Forever both sharing an interest in grassland management for song-birds and ring-necked pheasants. Pooling of resources and sharing of information can enhance overall efforts and develop beneficial partnerships.

Action 1.5.1. Identify groups interested in pheasants and grassland birds and participate in cooperative efforts that will further the goals of this plan.

Section II

Artificially Propagated Pheasants

Goal 2: Provide artificially propagated pheasants to increase recreational hunting opportunities and promote participation in shooting sports throughout New York State.

Reynolds Game Farm Propagation Facility

Objective 2.1. Maintain and administer the Reynolds Game Farm facility to meet pheasant production objectives.

The game farm facility is located on 166 acres and consists of a complex of buildings used for pheasant brooding, incubation, hatching, storage, and employee office space. Approximately 30 acres of land are used to raise pheasants to maturity in outdoor covered pens. Coordination of game farm maintenance and pheasant propagation programs ensures program delivery to stakeholders. Table 1 is a summary of DEC pheasant production for 1991-2009.

Action 2.1.1. Develop and implement a ten-year plan of Game Farm capital, vehicle, and equipment needs.

Action 2.1.2. Adequately staff and fund the game farm to meet program objectives.

Action 2.1.3. Research methods to reduce the costs and improve efficiency of game farm pheasant production and distribution, and implement changes.

Adult Pheasants

Objective 2.2. Hatch, raise, and distribute adult (18 weeks or older) pheasants for the Adult Pheasant Release Program.

Adult pheasants raised and released for special hunts, Youth Pheasant Hunt Weekends, and regular pheasant hunting seasons provide the greatest recreational return in terms of birds observed and hunter harvest rates. DEC releases adult pheasants on more than 100 release sites open to public hunting prior to and during the regular pheasant hunting season. Numbers of birds distributed to each DEC region are based generally on the availability of suitable release sites and pheasant hunter numbers.

Action 2.2.1. Provide at least 25,000 adult pheasants for fall stocking and distribute among DEC regions in 2010. Increase annual adult pheasant production to 30,000 birds in 2011 (See *Action 2.3.2.*).

Action 2.2.2. Release at least 10 percent of the adult pheasants for youth pheasant hunt weekends at selected locations.

Action 2.2.3. Provide up to 2,000 additional adult pheasants for special hunts sponsored by other groups such as Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow, and including hunts for women, novices, people with disabilities, and junior hunters.

Young Pheasants

Objective 2.3. Hatch, raise, and distribute young (7-10 weeks old) pheasants for the Cooperative Young Pheasant Release Program through 2010. The program will be discontinued thereafter.

The Cooperative Young Pheasant Release Program (YPRP) was created in 1992 to increase involvement of landowners and sportsmen in New York's pheasant management program. It was intended to provide a more traditional hunting experience for wilder birds and help secure thousands of acres of land for public hunting. It is well documented that young pheasants released in the summer are harvested at very low rates during the fall pheasant hunting season due to a number of factors including: birds released in the summer have a long time to disperse off release sites; mortality rates are high as opposed to birds released just prior to and during the pheasant hunting season; and few hunters pursue them. Although the YPRP is very popular with participants, it is apparent that many more pheasant hunters would benefit if the Department raised and released adult pheasants instead of young pheasants. Observations and comments from staff, sportsmen, and cooperators lead us to believe that pheasant hunters would be better served by eliminating the YPRP. Cooperators may choose to participate in the Department's Day-old Pheasant Chick Program as an alternative.

Action 2.3.1 Provide up to 15,000 young pheasants for distribution during summer 2010.

Action 2.3.2 Eliminate the YPRP in 2011 and raise 5,000 adult pheasants instead. The number of adult pheasants stocked in the fall will therefore increase from 25,000 to 30,000 birds annually.

Day-old Chicks

Objective 2.4. Hatch and distribute day-old pheasant chicks for the Cooperative Day-old Pheasant Chick Program.

The Cooperative Day-old Pheasant Chick Program began in 1910. Cooperators receive day-old chicks, provide the proper facilities to care for them, and incur all costs to raise and release the birds. The program provides educational opportunities, especially for 4-H youth, in all aspects of game bird husbandry and allows hunters to increase their pheasant hunting opportunities.

Action 2.4.1. Provide a minimum of 60,000 day-old pheasant chicks per year to selected cooperators to be raised and released by December 1 annually.

Access and Harvest Opportunity

Objective 2.5. Improve access to and harvest opportunity for all propagated pheasants released by the Department, program cooperators, and others.

The primary purpose of DEC's pheasant propagation program is to provide recreational pheasant hunting opportunity across the state. Hunter satisfaction is most often related to seeing and harvesting pheasants. Extending the hunting season and allowing the take of either-sex birds where wild populations no longer exist provides some additional opportunity. The Department

should also promote pheasant hunting as a stepping stone to other small game hunting opportunities.

Action 2.5.1. Allow the harvest of cock and hen pheasants and extend season dates in Wildlife Management Units that have no sustainable wild pheasant populations (Figure 3).

Action 2.5.2. Improve habitat on DEC pheasant release sites to hold birds better, increase harvest, and increase hunter satisfaction.

Action 2.5.3. Establish minimum release site criteria and release standards for pheasants propagated by DEC and program cooperators.

Action 2.5.4. Provide accurate and timely information to help hunters know generally when and where they can hunt pheasants propagated by DEC and program cooperators.

Action 2.5.5. Establish pheasant hunting or multiple use areas accessible to people with disabilities.

Action 2.5.6. Evaluate current mowing practices on Wildlife Management Areas and other state lands and develop and implement mowing standards to best benefit wild pheasants, pheasants released for hunting, and other grassland wildlife.

Section III

Information and Education

Goal 3: Expand the use of the DEC website (www.dec.ny.gov) to inform and educate the public about wild and propagated pheasants and their management in New York.

Objective 3.1. Achieve an informed public with realistic expectations for wild pheasant management by 2015.

The wild ring-necked pheasant population declined in the early 1970s and has remained at all-time lows for a variety of reasons. It's important that the public understands why we don't have high pheasant populations in New York, including a realistic prognosis for declining pheasant populations in the future.

Action 3.1.1. Update the pamphlet, *Ring-necked Pheasants in New York*, by 2012 to reflect the current status of wild pheasants in New York.

Action 3.1.2. Develop and disseminate other informational materials via DEC publications and website to answer specific questions about wild pheasants in New York.

Objective 3.2. Develop and distribute technical information about pheasant propagation programs in New York.

It is important that we continue to provide current and factual information about the purposes and benefits of DEC's pheasant propagation programs. The public hunts state-reared and released pheasants and participates in cooperative rearing and release programs. People desire information about pheasants as demonstrated by the large volume of requests the Department receives from the DEC website and by phone calls to the state game farm. Understanding how to raise and release pheasants and understanding the role of pheasant propagation are important to the overall success of the programs.

Action 3.2.1. Annually update the *Pheasant Propagation Program Overview* on the DEC website.

Action 3.2.2. Maintain current informational materials related to the Department's cooperator programs, including application materials, release site criteria, and program expectations and requirements.

Objective 3.3. Provide technical information for landowners interested in improving habitat for wild or propagated pheasants, with emphasis on programs and procedures applicable to the focus area in western New York.

Many landowners request information about improving habitat for pheasants and other wildlife. The Department has a unique opportunity to assist landowners by providing up-to-date information on establishing and maintaining pheasant habitat. Collaborating with other wildlife and agricultural professionals will be helpful. The Department can also establish habitat management demonstrations so that landowners can observe techniques in person.

Action 3.3.1. Update DEC's *Landowner's Manual for Ring-necked Pheasant Habitat Improvement*.

Action 3.3.2. Develop pheasant habitat demonstrations at the DEC Reynolds Game Farm and/or a location in the western New York focus area to show different mixes of grasses, forbs, and food plots to increase landowner participation and success.

Section IV

Monitoring and Evaluation

Goal 4: Ensure successful implementation of this pheasant plan and identify areas for improvement or modification.

Objective 4.1. Evaluate progress on implementation of the actions prescribed in this plan.

Preparing a plan to manage a species is no small undertaking. Preparing an annual summary of progress and accomplishments relative to the plan activities is useful for the Department and for the public and helps to maintain focus on program goals and objectives. It provides a level of accountability.

Action 4.1.1. Annually prepare a report summarizing pheasant plan activities completed and make that information available to the public via the DEC website.

Objective 4.2. Maintain current estimates of the number of pheasant hunters and the number of pheasants harvested in major regions of New York.

A primary goal of this plan is to meet public demand for pheasant hunting opportunity, so measuring that demand is important. Periodically estimating the number of pheasant hunters and pheasants harvested provides long-term data that is helpful for managing pheasants. Knowing how many people hunt pheasants and how many they harvest provides insight into hunting regulations, and socioeconomic values of pheasant hunting.

Action 4.2.1. Use the DEC Small Game Hunter Survey (Table 2) to estimate pheasant hunting participation and harvest, along with other small game hunting activity, in major regions of the state at least bi-annually.

Objective 4.3. Maintain current socioeconomic information for pheasant hunting in New York, including desires for hunting opportunity, support for various program components, and economic contributions of pheasant hunting.

Hunters have many desires, thoughts, and beliefs as they relate to small game hunting. Surveying small game hunters to find out what they think about current regulations and opportunities may help us to better manage our small game. Surveys can also be a tool for DEC staff to ask specific questions they have about certain aspects of pheasant management in New York. It is useful to determine how pheasant hunting activities impact the state economy. Understanding the economic value of pheasant hunting can help sportsmen and DEC administrators make informed decisions about pheasant programs and pheasant management.

Action 4.3.1. Use the DEC Small Game Hunter Survey or other special surveys to determine hunter or other stakeholder attitudes, opinions, desires and expenditures related to DEC's pheasant management programs.

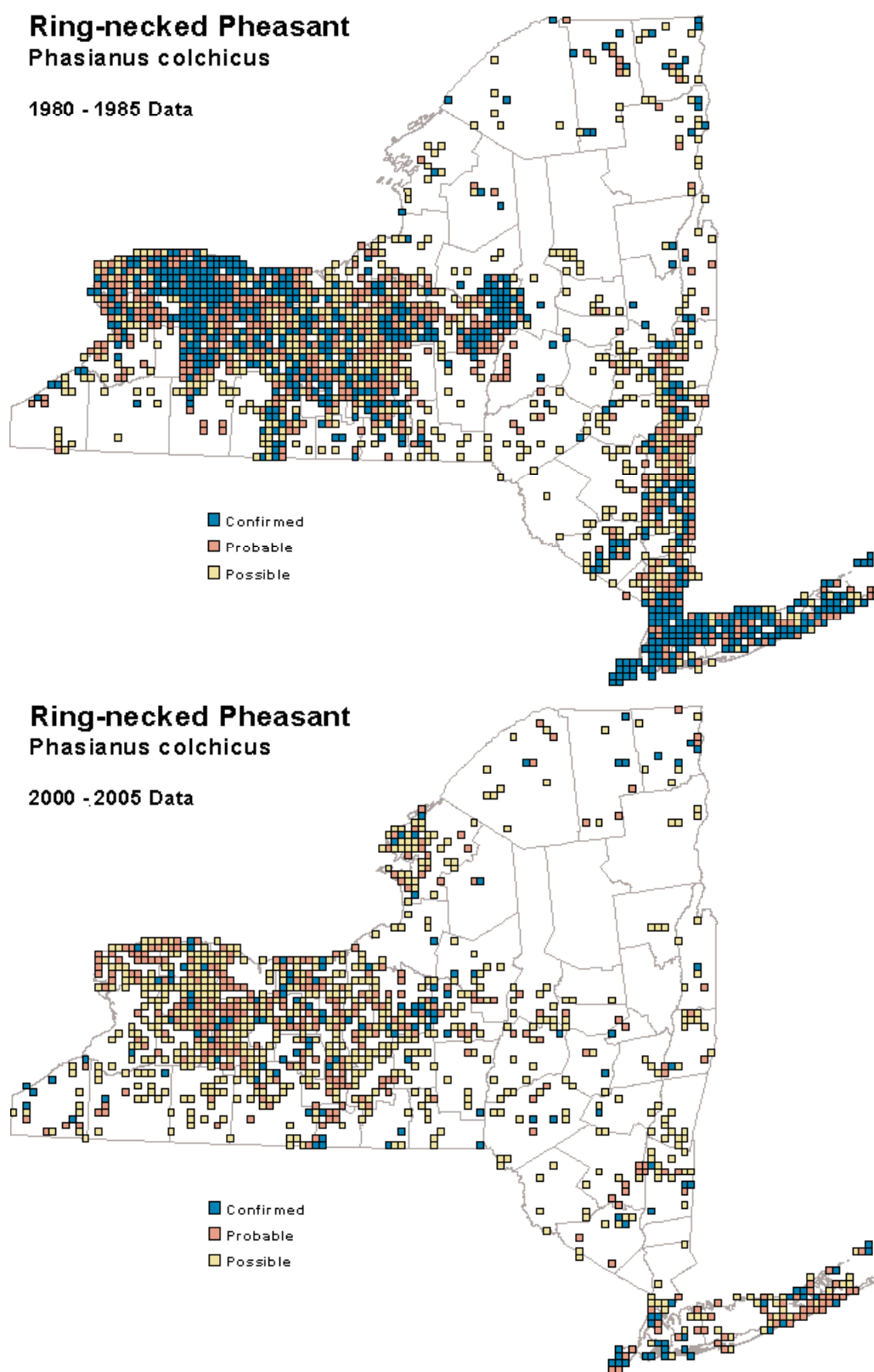


Figure 1. NYS Breeding Bird Atlas Comparison, 1980-85 and 2000-05.

Landowner Incentive Program Grassland Focus Areas

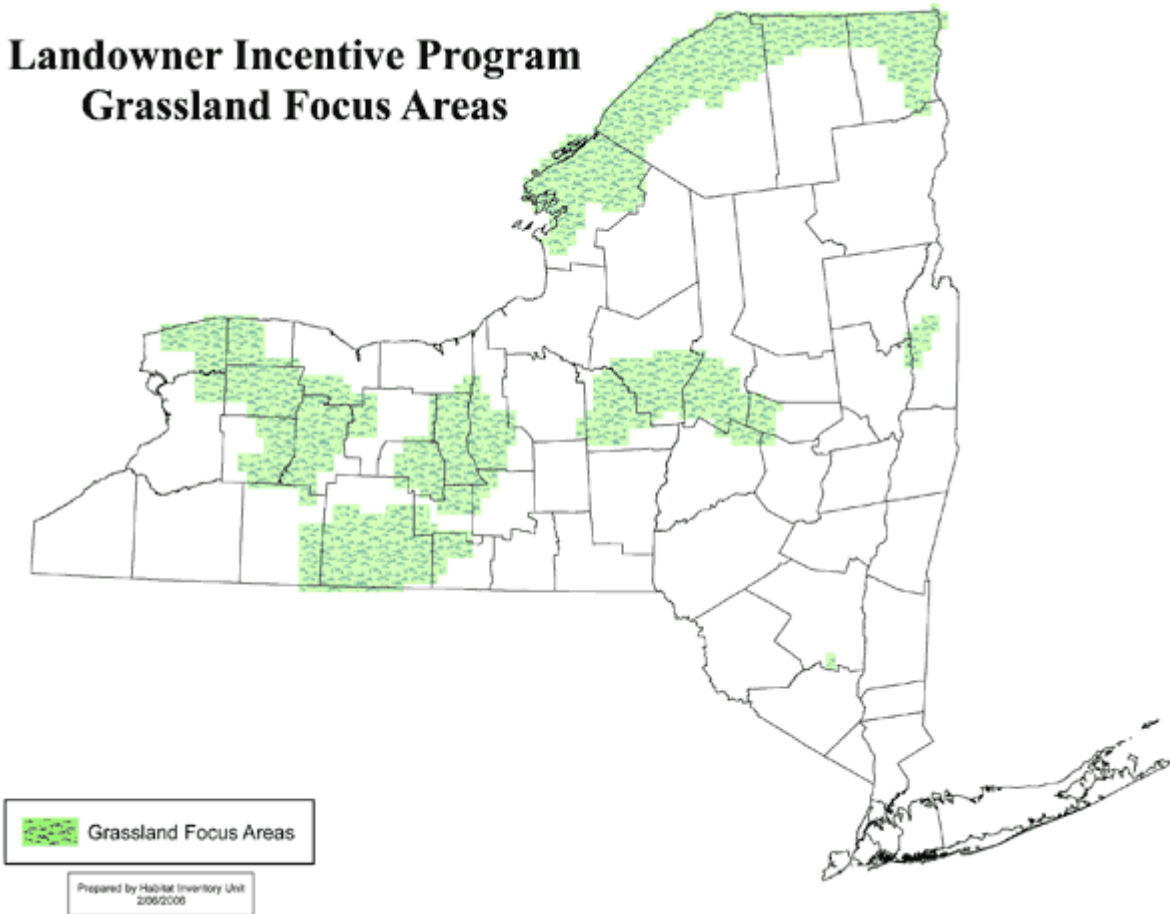
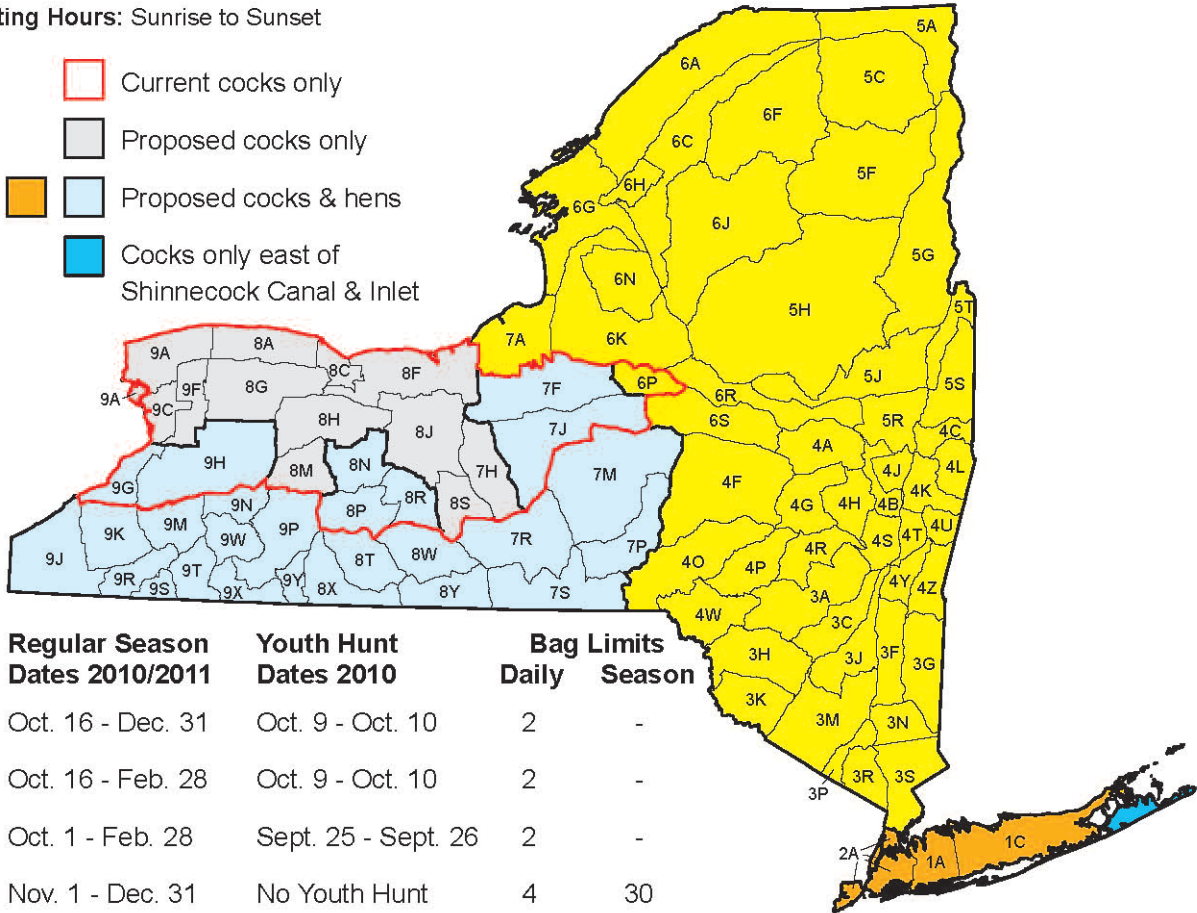


Figure 2. DEC Landowner Incentive Program Grassland Focus Areas.

Proposed Pheasant Hunting Regulations

Hunting Hours: Sunrise to Sunset

- Current cocks only
- Proposed cocks only
- Proposed cocks & hens
- Cocks only east of Shinnecock Canal & Inlet



	Regular Season Dates 2010/2011	Youth Hunt Dates 2010	Bag Limits	
			Daily	Season
	Oct. 16 - Dec. 31	Oct. 9 - Oct. 10	2	-
	Oct. 16 - Feb. 28	Oct. 9 - Oct. 10	2	-
	Oct. 1 - Feb. 28	Sept. 25 - Sept. 26	2	-
	Nov. 1 - Dec. 31	No Youth Hunt	4	30
	Nov. 1 - Dec. 31	No Youth Hunt	4	30

DEC lacks regulatory authority to set pheasant seasons on Long Island.

In Wildlife Management Unit 2A, pheasant hunting is permitted by falconry only.

Figure 3. DEC Proposed Pheasant Hunting Regulations for 2010-11.

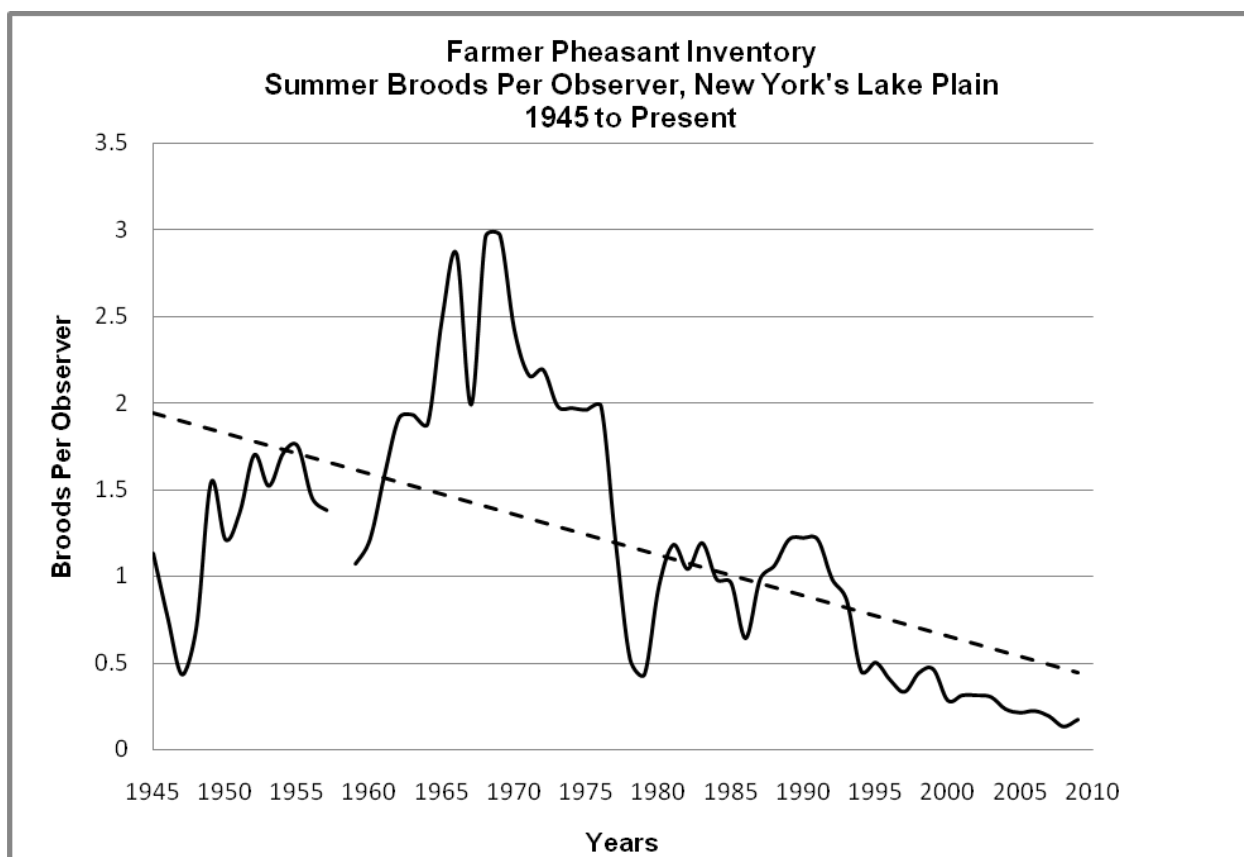


Figure 4. DEC Farmer Pheasant Inventory, 1945-2009.

Table 1. DEC Pheasant Production, 1991-2009.

Year	Day-old Chicks	Young Pheasants *	Adult Pheasants **
1991-92	63,281	0	31,871
1992-93	57,175	8,346 (145)	33,305
1993-94	64,200	11,950 (219)	30,867
1994-95	53,817	15,200 (282)	26,849
1995-96	55,338	14,700 (272)	29,032
1996-97	60,500	15,400 (290)	28,618
1997-98	61,750	15,689 (279)	29,000
1998-99	56,198	16,640 (298)	28,609
1999-00	56,321	16,860 (285)	31,689
2000-01	60,043	11,560 (271)	21,612 ***
2001-02	64,509	12,680 (303)	27,159
2002-03	68,974	13,920 (328)	27,300
2003-04	67,265	14,400 (346)	28,721
2004-05	62,133	15,800 (380)	24,841
2005-06	60,332	15,760 (376)	29,623
2006-07	56,815	15,560 (368)	29,774
2007-08	60,087	15,360 (360)	26,396
2008-09	58,929	15,160 (356)	31,304
2009-10	50,293	13,880 (330)	31,136

* Number of cooperators is in parentheses.

** Includes fall stocking, birds for special hunts (youth, women, novice, and people with disabilities), and National field trials.

*** Includes the purchase of 7,835 adult pheasants.

Table 2. DEC Annual Mail Survey of Small Game Hunters in New York, 1999-2008: Pheasants.

Year	Estimated Number of Pheasant Hunters	Estimated Harvest	Estimated Days Hunted
1999-00	48,008	194,112	352,186
2000-01	-----	-----	-----
2001-02	60,282	137,369	-----
2002-03	60,227	119,577	248,016
2003-04	57,043	91,745	218,761
2004-05	55,600	96,939	219,034
2005-06	45,942	80,083	196,274
2006-07	60,290	130,082	262,410
2007-08	52,732	111,015	207,813
2008-09	54,545	124,852	251,299

Appendix I

Pheasant Plan Summary of and Responses to Public Comments

The Department provided approximately 12 weeks of opportunity for the public to comment on proposed changes to New York's pheasant management plan. A preliminary "issues" document was distributed to key stakeholders in late April 2009, with comments requested back by May 31, 2009. All of the comments received were either addressed in the revised draft or are summarized below. Availability of the revised draft plan was announced in late September via press release, the Environmental Notice Bulletin (ENB), and posting on the DEC website, with comments due back by November 13, 2009.

We received relatively few comments, given the popularity and sometimes controversial nature of pheasant management. However, most of the comments received supported or accepted the actions we proposed as reasonable steps forward at this time. There were other comments that were beyond the scope of the plan revision that we were undertaking; these ranged from terminating all pheasant management in New York to expanding the program by several fold to restore wild populations across large areas of the state. Our responses to these and other comments that were not addressed in the final plan are summarized below.

Comment: Pheasants are a non-native species. Cease all management activities related to pheasants, including pheasant propagation at the DEC Reynolds Game Farm, and use the funding to enhance native wildlife species and associated non-consumptive outdoor recreational activities.

Response: Although non-native, pheasants have occupied the New York landscape for more than 100 years, and the state propagation program has been raising and releasing pheasants since 1909. Unlike some introduced species, pheasants have not been detrimental to our native flora or fauna. Pheasants are highly desired by many landowners as well as pheasant hunters, as evident by their participation in cooperative pheasant programs, farmer surveys, and hunting seasons. The question of whether to end DEC's pheasant propagation program was addressed in January 2009 when Governor Paterson directed DEC to halt the proposed closure of the Reynolds Game Farm as state officials and hunting groups explored options to fully support the costs of the program with increased hunting license fees. A commitment was made to continue the State's pheasant management programs when sporting license fees were increased for the 2009-10 license year and beyond. The charge to the Pheasant Plan Revision Team was to assume that the current level of resources (staff time and facilities) would be available for pheasant propagation and management for the foreseeable future.

Comment: Continue to provide 600 pheasants for the National Field Trials held at the DEC Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area for the benefits they provide to the local economy.

Response: DEC supports the National Field Trial by allowing use of the DEC Three Rivers Wildlife Management Area for approximately three weeks every fall. A building is provided for the trial headquarters, fields are mowed specifically for the trials, and DEC staff time is allocated

to help administer the events. Under the revised pheasant plan, no State-raised pheasants will be allocated for field trials. We recognize the value of economic benefits to the local economy. However, there is little benefit to the sportsmen and women that purchase licenses to hunt pheasants in New York (participants in the field trials are not required to purchase hunting licenses). Many of the pheasants released during the trials are flushed off the area or killed by predators resulting in minimal opportunity for pheasant hunters. The birds would be better utilized by releasing them just prior to or during the fall regular pheasant hunting season or for youth pheasant hunt weekends. Harvest rates should be higher and sportsmen's dollars spent more effectively. In lieu of the pheasants provided by the Department, National Field Trial organizers can purchase birds at reasonable cost from licensed private game bird breeders around the state.

Comment: Continue the Young Pheasant Release Program (YPRP). It provides wilder birds and additional hunting opportunity.

Response: Young pheasants have been released since 1992. As expected, our research determined that only a small percentage of the young pheasants released in the summer are harvested. Our new pheasant plan terminates the YPRP and increases the Adult Pheasant Release Program by 5,000 birds. The additional 5,000 adult pheasants released in the fall will be harvested at a higher rate and provide greater hunting opportunity. A great deal of DEC staff time will be saved that was allocated to administering the YPRP, including review of applications, approval and delivery notifications, release site inspections, and delivery of 15,000 young pheasants during the summer months.

Comment: Maintain the current cock-only hunting areas to protect hen pheasants.

Response: Our proposed changes to pheasant hunting regulations would reduce the size of the cocks-only pheasant hunting area and extend hunting seasons. Some hunters are opposed to hunting hen pheasants anywhere in the state. Some are opposed to reducing the size of the current cocks-only pheasant hunting area. However, the latest data from the Breeding Bird Atlas and land use indicate that our best pheasant range has shrunk, mostly from agricultural land reverting to forest. Wild pheasants have become scarce in both the cock-only and either-sex hunting areas. Therefore, we realigned the best remaining pheasant range with the appropriate wildlife management units and opened up other areas to cock and hen hunting. Opening up poor or non-pheasant range to cock and hen hunting helps us to best utilize state game farm pheasant releases and releases by private game bird breeders. Few released pheasants survive until spring. Our longer seasons are structured to encourage the harvest of released pheasants, but protect hens during mid to late winter in the cock-only pheasant hunting area.

Comment: Stock wild pheasants from South Dakota. They will survive better than game farm birds.

Response: Pheasants in New York declined for a variety of reasons since the mid 1970s. The state has become more forested. Pheasants are agricultural land wildlife. Commercial and residential development has eliminated pheasant habitat. Modern farming is much more "clean." Production of grain crops such as wheat and oats has declined, reducing the amount of food and secondary nesting cover available. Lastly, secure nesting cover is in short supply. Poor habitat conditions make pheasants more vulnerable to predation. Unless land use trends in New York

reverse dramatically, the release of any pheasants into New York habitats is unlikely to result in the establishment or supplementation of breeding populations. If habitat conditions become favorable again for pheasants they would likely increase without our help.

Comment: Predators have to be addressed for pheasants and other small game.

Response: Predation accounts for most non-hunting mortality of pheasants, but it is a natural part of any ecosystem. Predator populations generally reflect the abundance of prey populations, and we have limited ability to reduce predation rates on a landscape level. Large scale changes in land use have resulted in deterioration and loss of pheasant habitat in most areas of the state, and as habitat quantity or quality decline, pheasants become more vulnerable to predators. Habitat management to provide better cover for pheasants, or to make specific lands less attractive for certain predators, may prove beneficial on a site-specific or local level. Direct reduction or control of predator populations on a large scale is not feasible. Birds of prey are protected by federal and state laws and the high costs and public objections to such programs would also be prohibitive. Control of mammalian predators on a large scale by recreational hunting or trapping is limited by property access and variable harvest pressure in response to annual fur prices. However, people interested in restoring wild pheasants can allow or encourage legal trapping and hunting of mammalian predators on lands that they own to help reduce local predation.