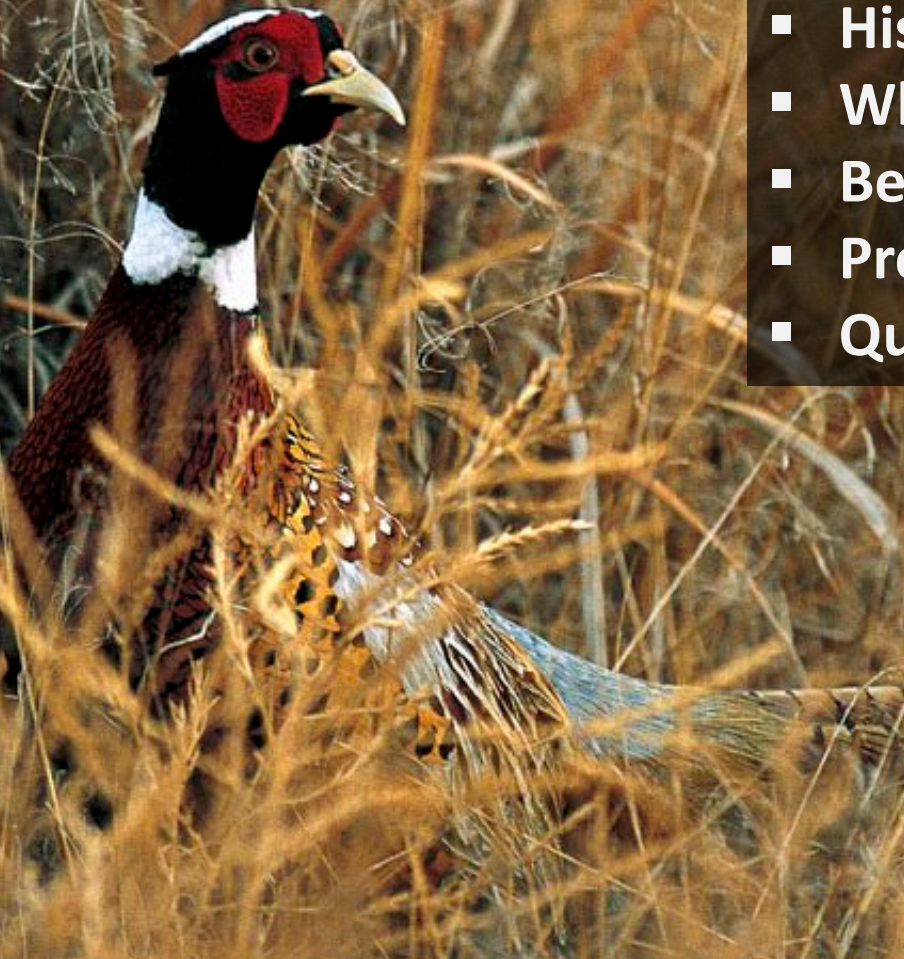


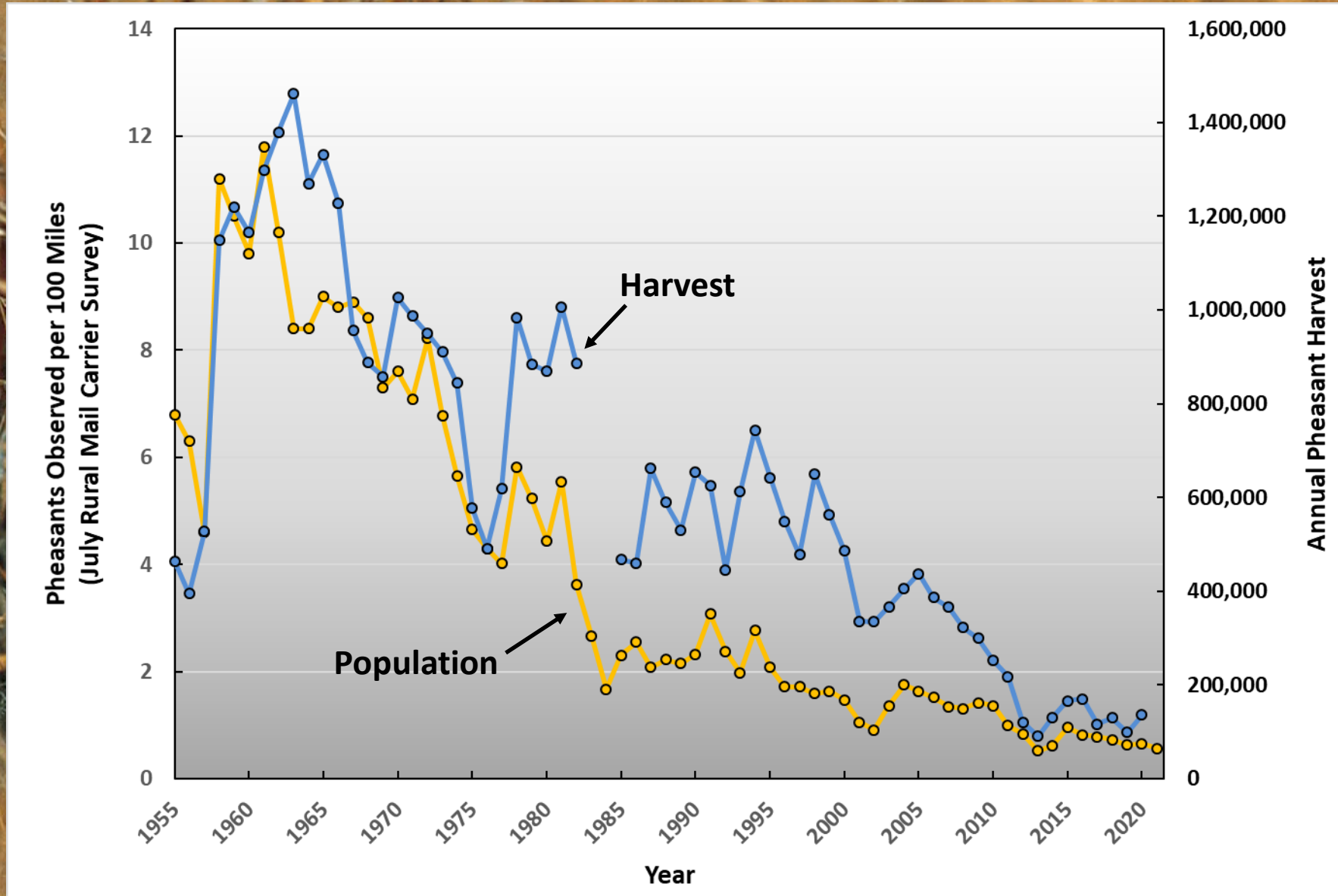
Preview of Berggren Plan 2.0

John Laux, NGPC Upland Game Program Manager

- History of Pheasants in Nebraska
- What Drives Pheasant Populations
- Berggren Plan Accomplishments
- Preview of the Updated Plan
- Questions/Feedback

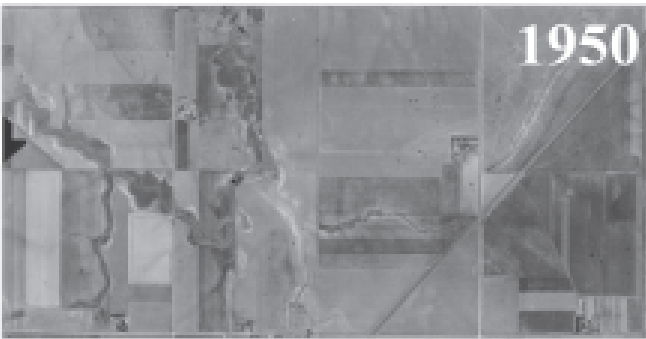


Nebraska's Long-Term Pheasant Population Trends

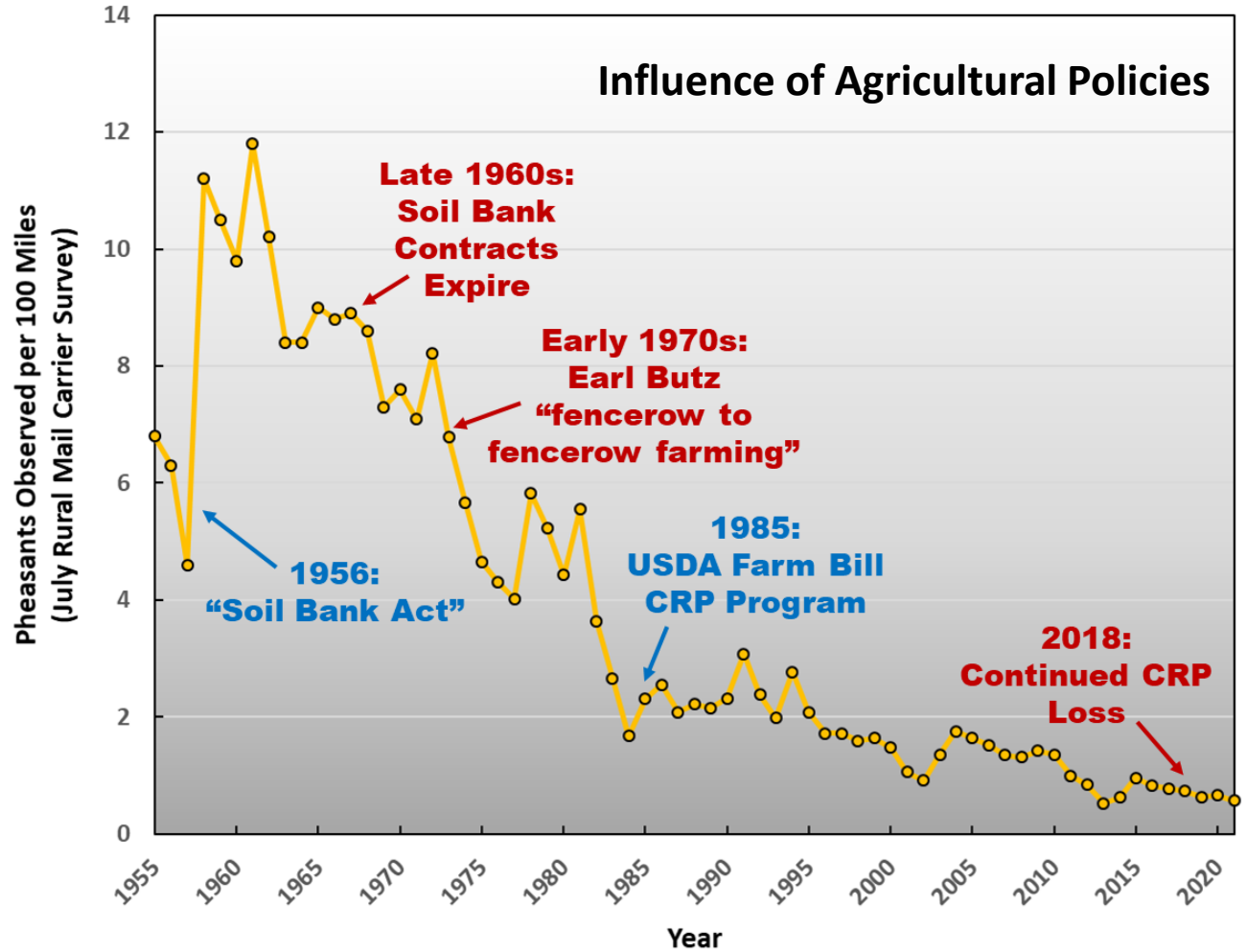


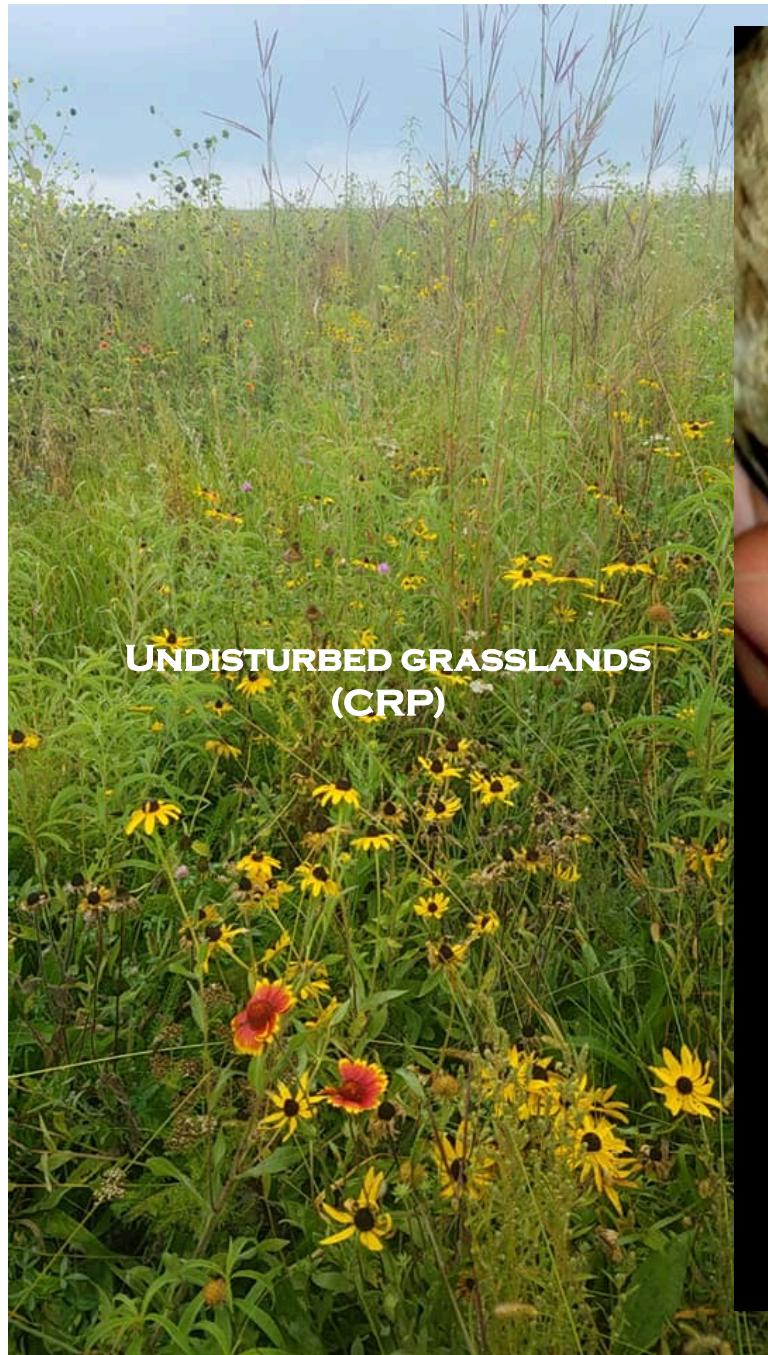
Habitat Loss Caused by Agricultural Land-Use Changes

Hiller et al. (2009)



- ↑ **Farm Size**
- ↑ **Field Size**
- ↑ **Row Crops**
- ↑ **Weed Control**
- ↓ **Farms (#)**
- ↓ **Crop Diversity**
- ↓ **Small Grains**
- ↓ **Idle Areas**





**UNDISTURBED GRASSLANDS
(CRP)**



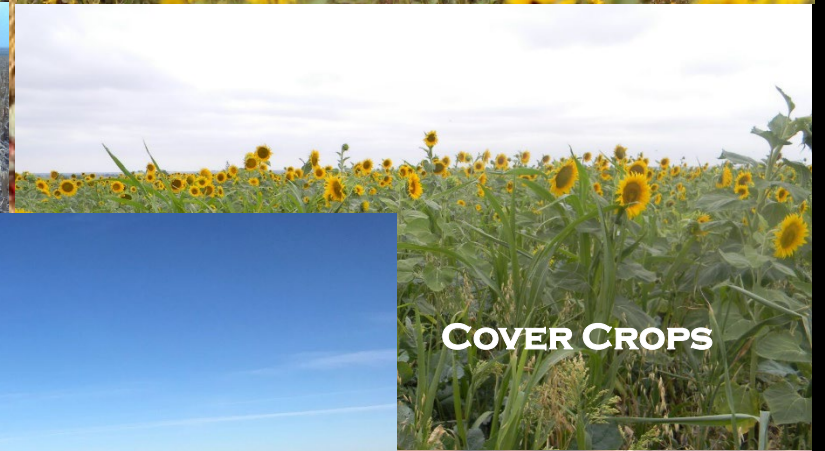
**SMALL GRAINS
(WINTER WHEAT)**



IDLE/WEEDY AREAS



**CROP STUBBLE
(TALL WHEAT/MILO)**



COVER CROPS



UNFARMED DRAWS/PASTURE



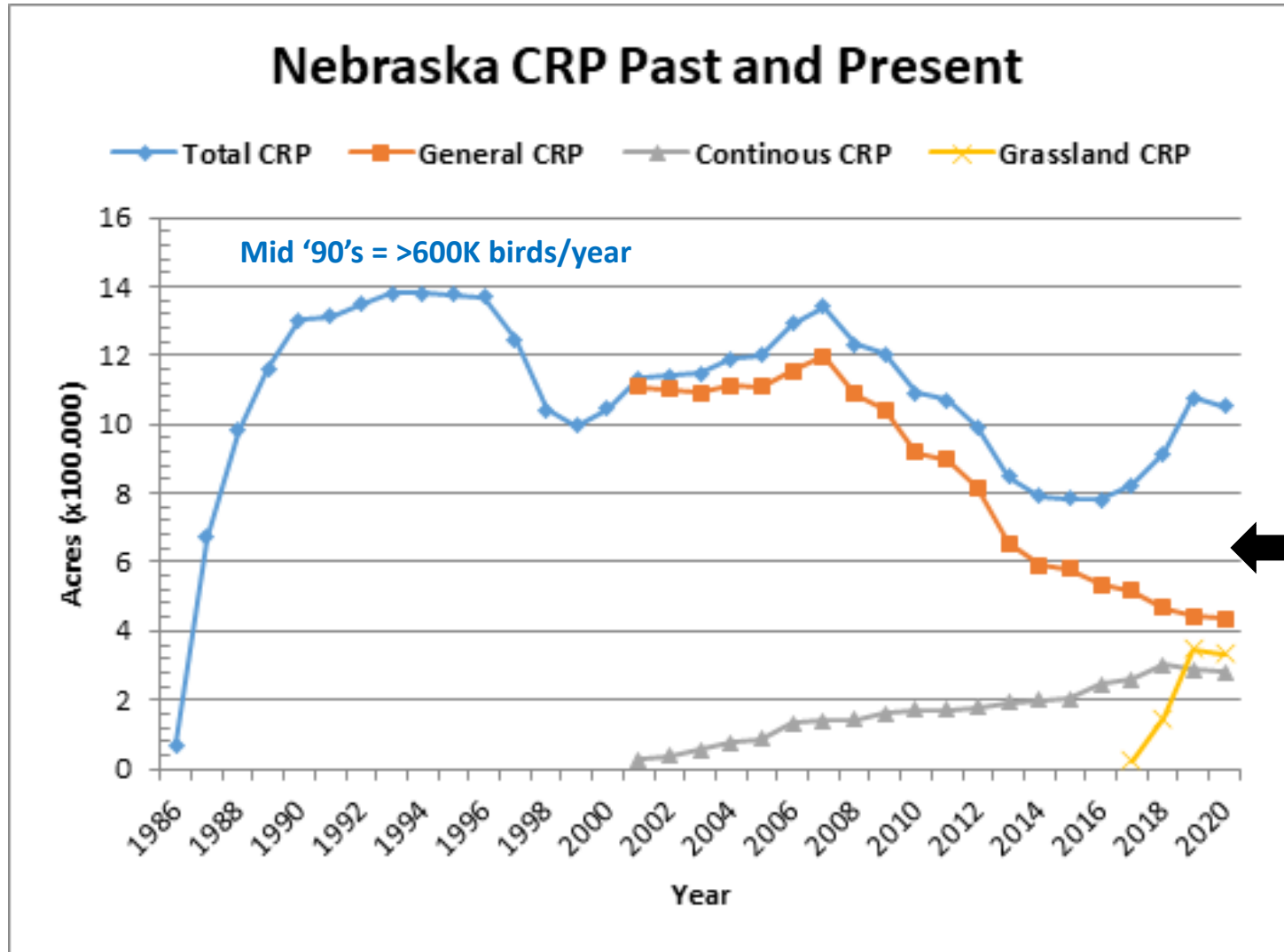
**THICKETS/
WOODY COVER**



WETLANDS



- Most Highly Preferred Cover Type
- Can Restore Habitat at Landscape Scale

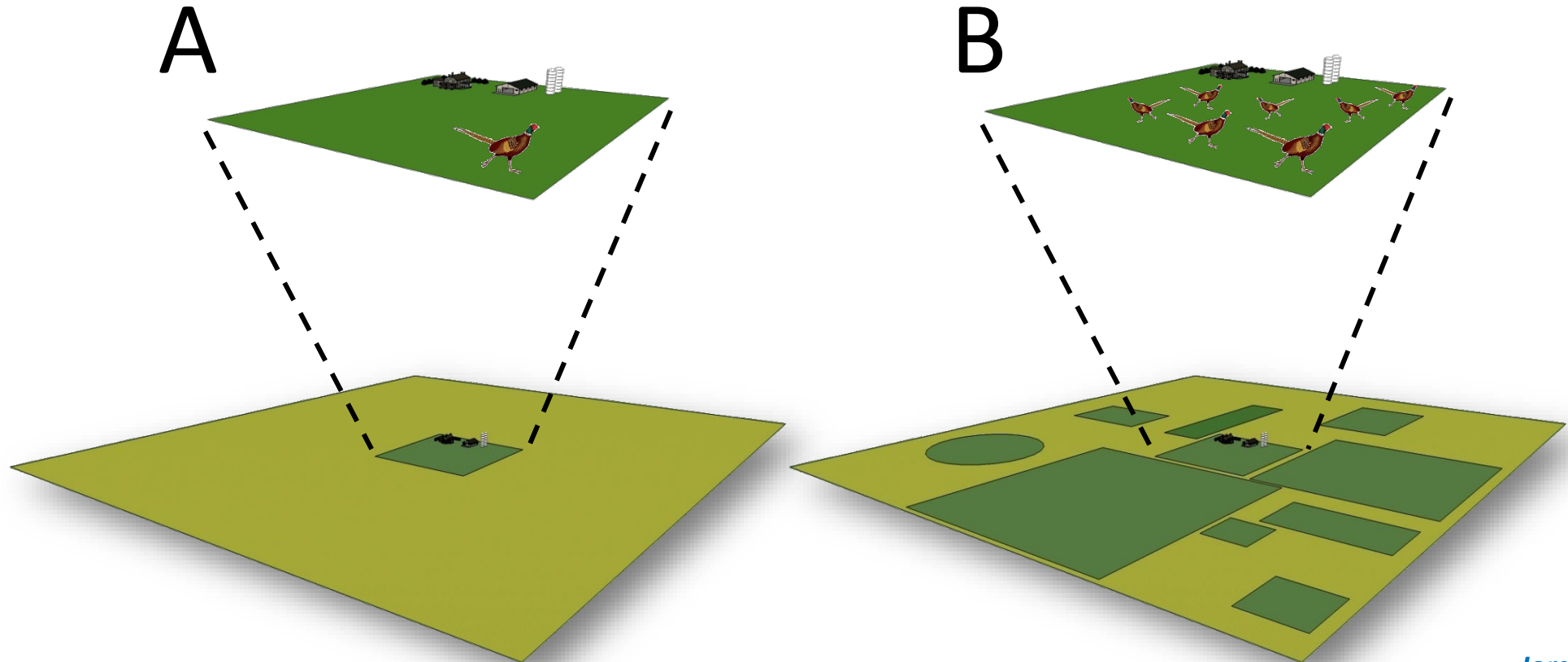
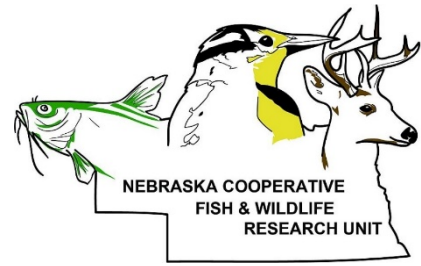


2009 to 2019 = 3.3M acres of grasslands converted to cropland

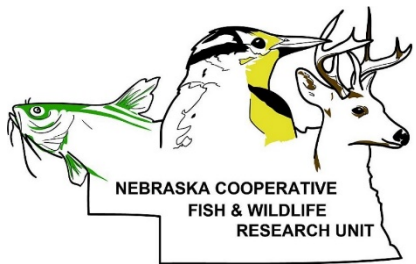
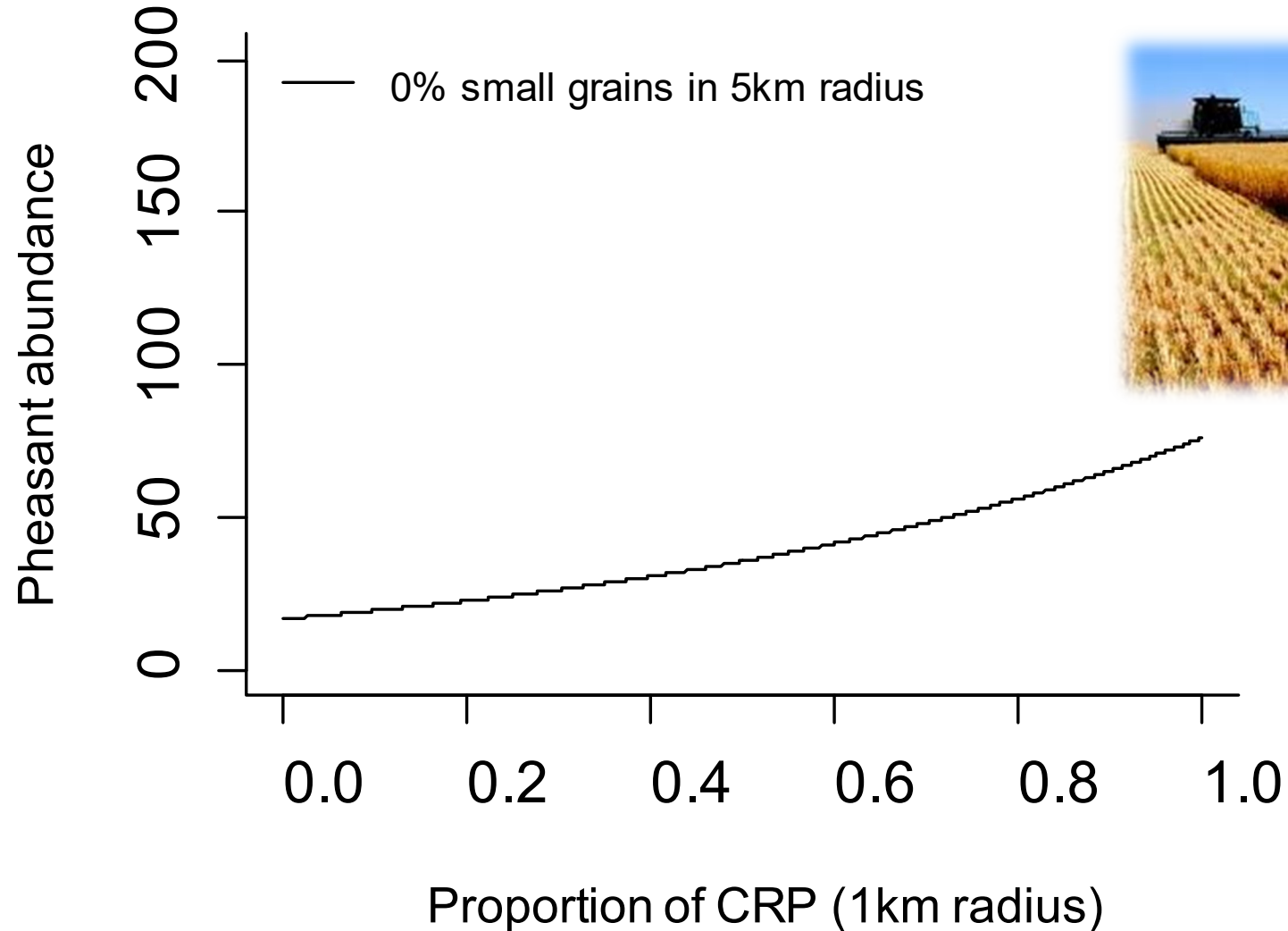
(World Wildlife Fund 2020)

Is all CRP equal in value?

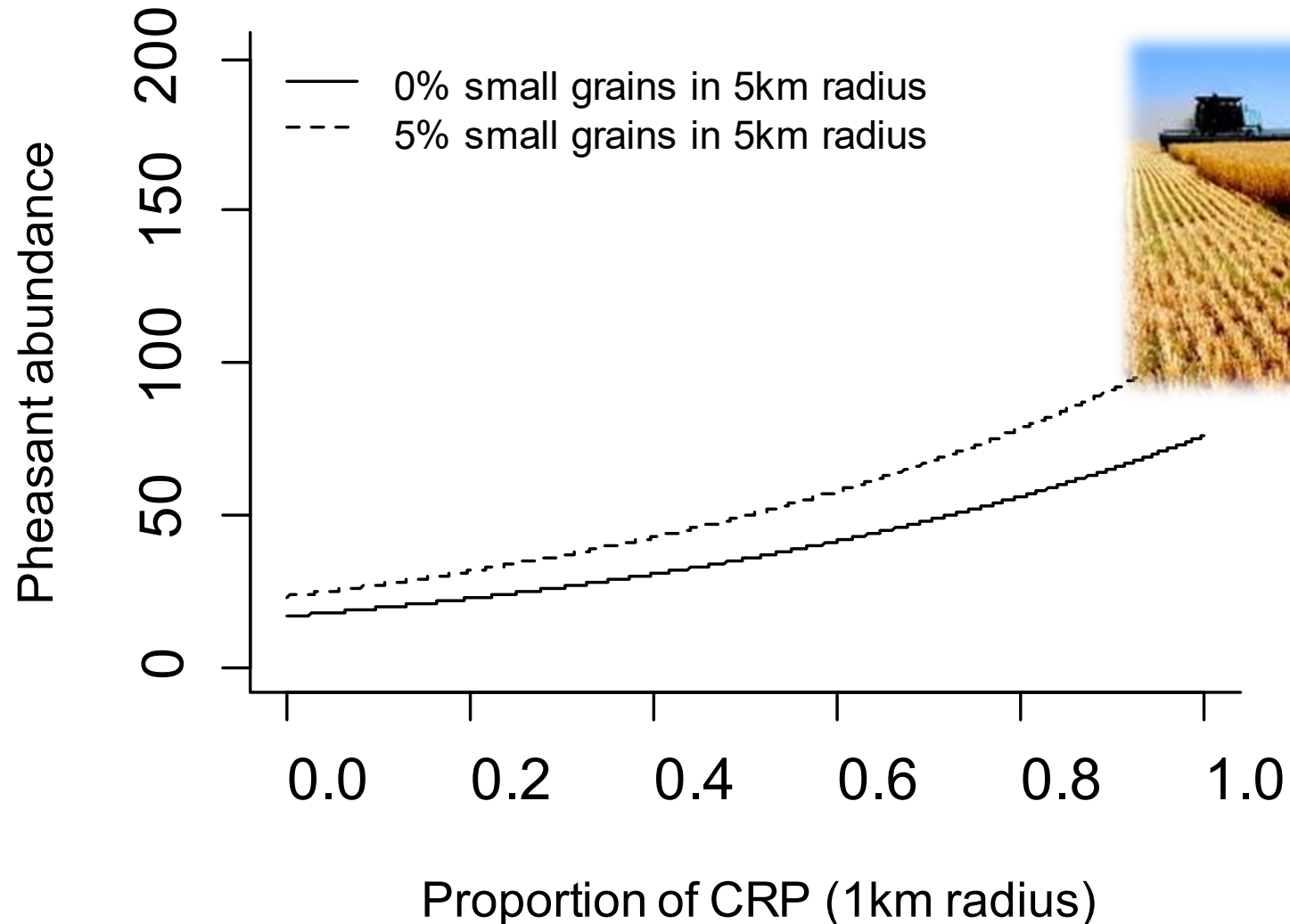
Does the surrounding landscape matter?



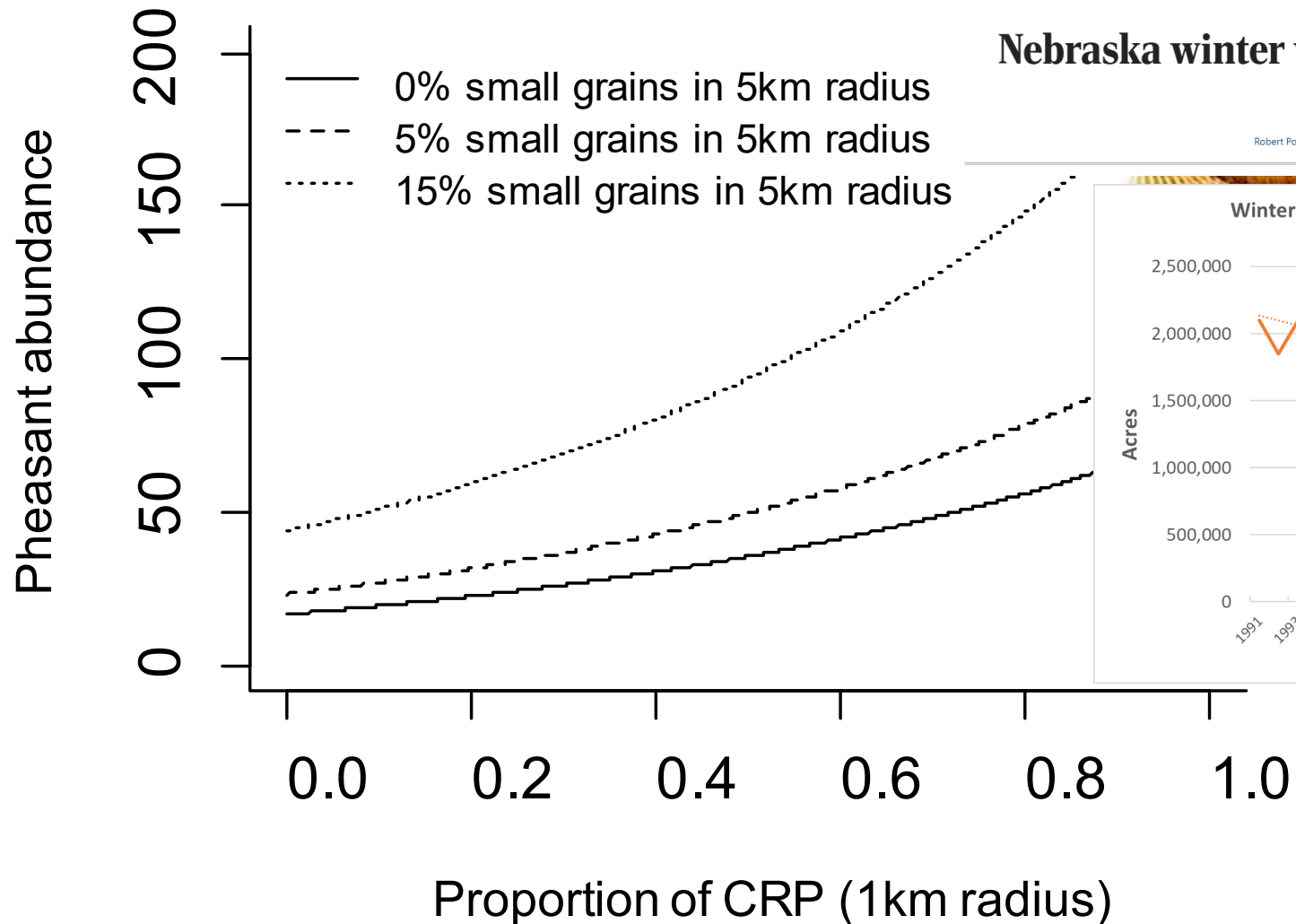
CRP enrollment increases pheasant abundance and is magnified by the small grains in the landscape



CRP enrollment increases pheasant abundance and is magnified by the small grains in the landscape

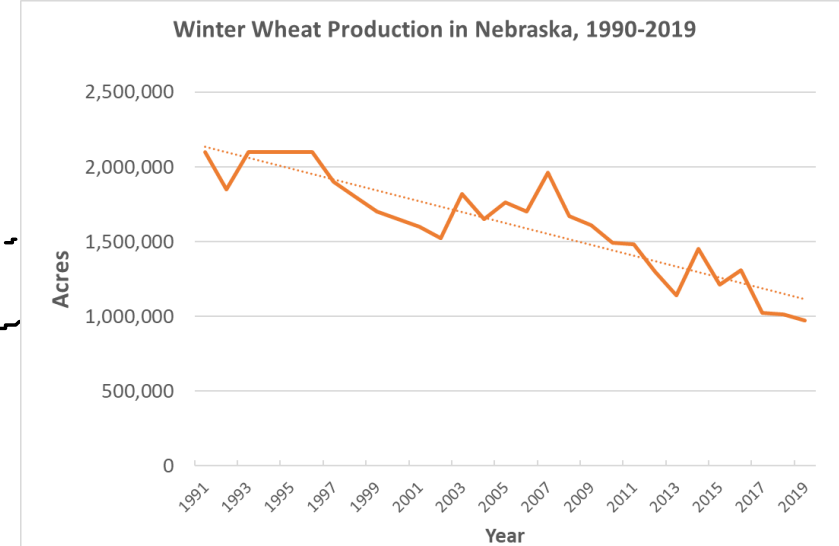


CRP enrollment increases pheasant abundance and is magnified by the small grains in the landscape

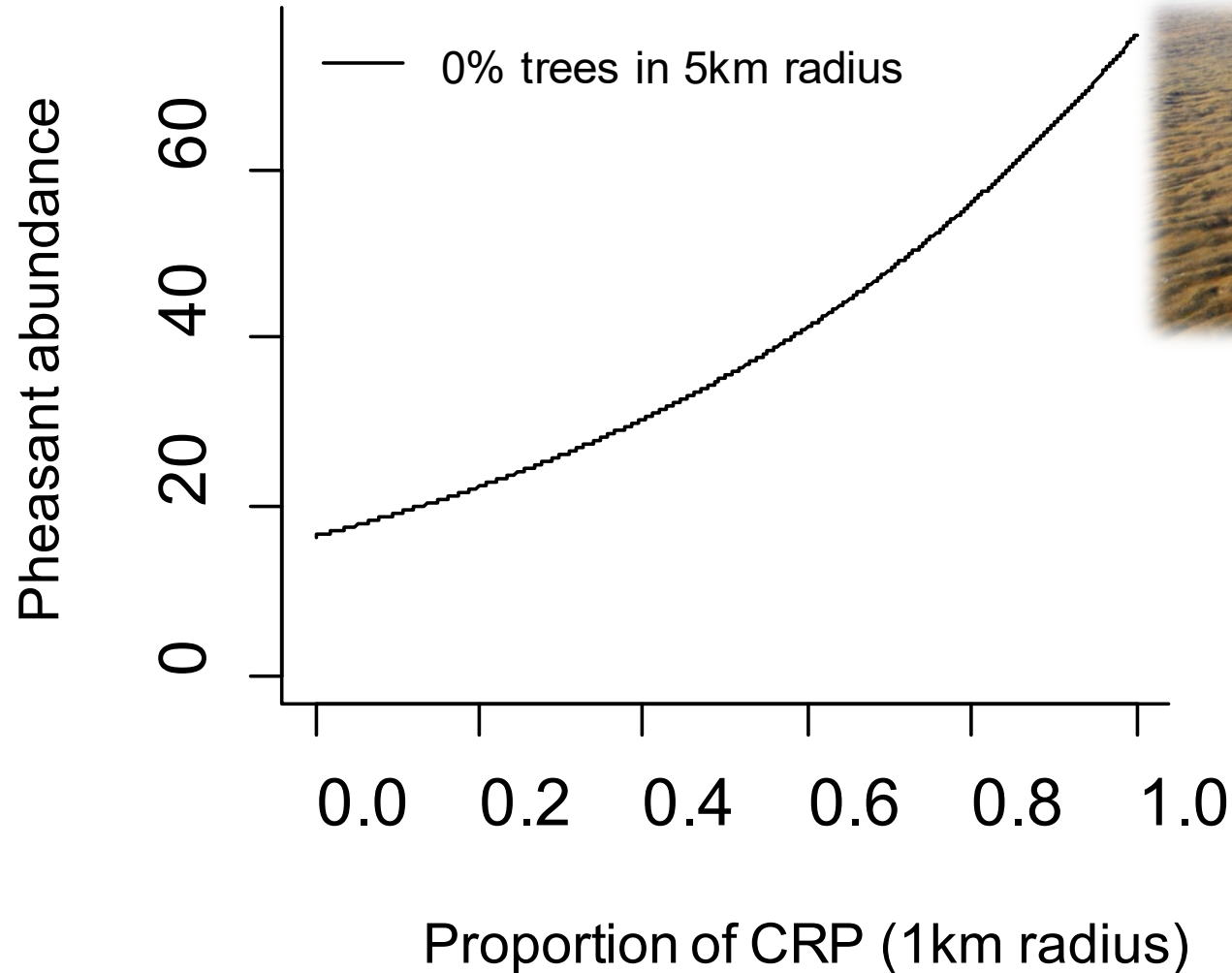


Nebraska winter wheat seedings at a record low

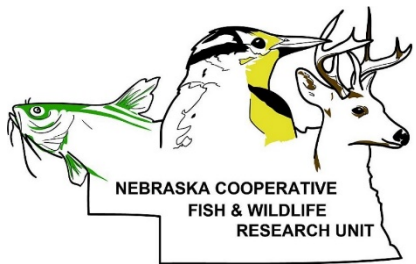
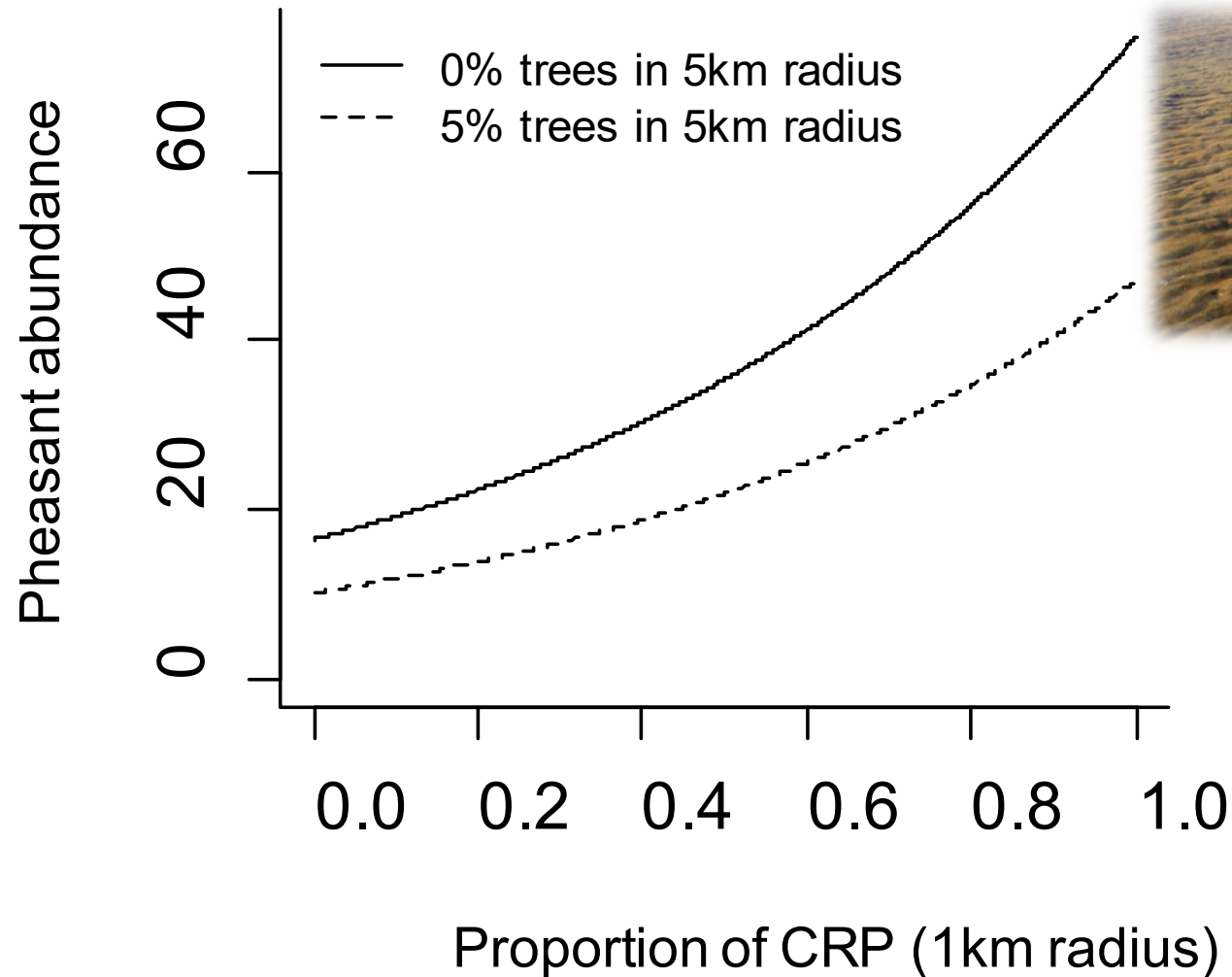
Robert Pore Jan 12, 2018 Updated Jun 24, 2019 0



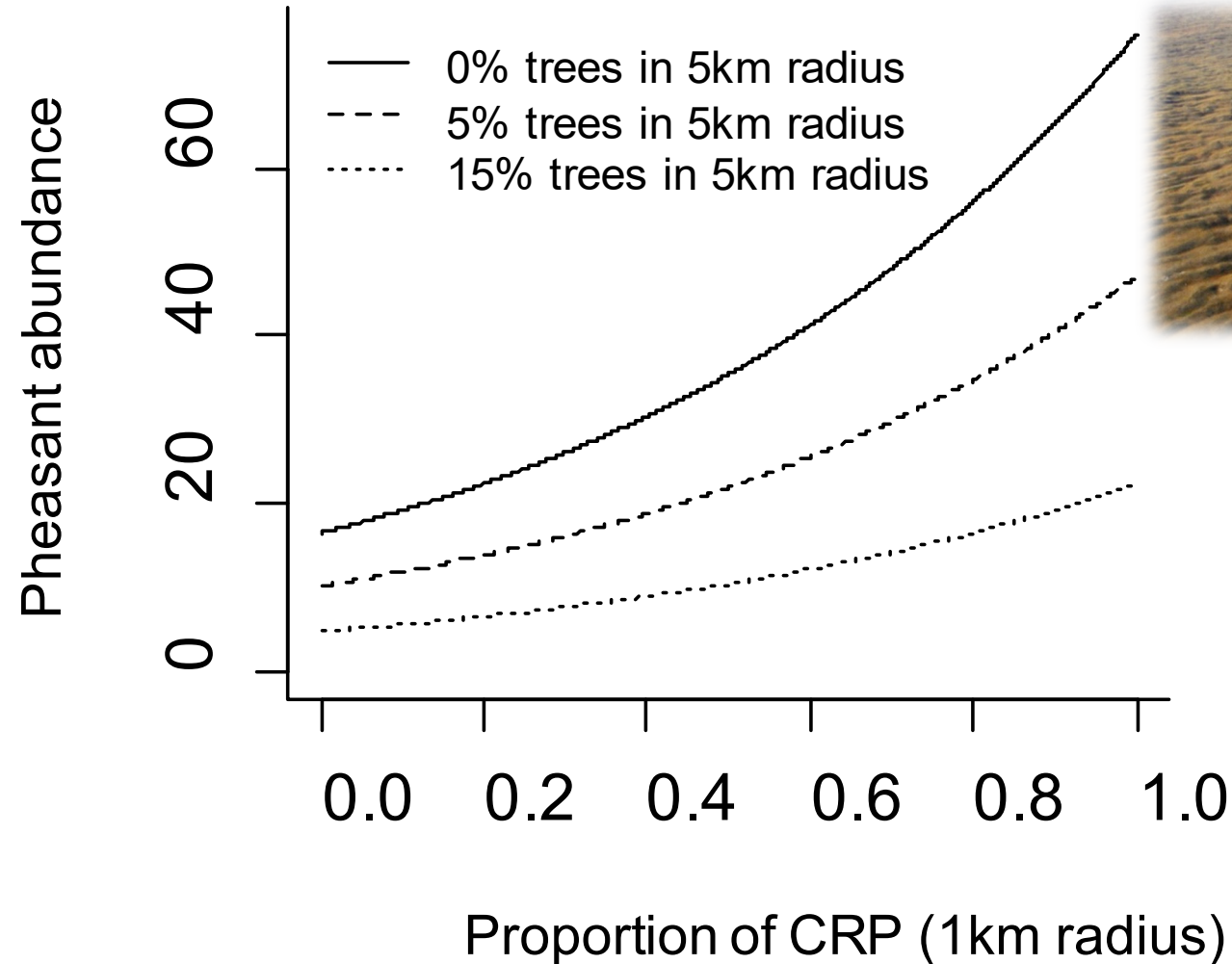
CRP enrollment increases pheasant abundance;
however the benefits of CRP are inhibited by trees



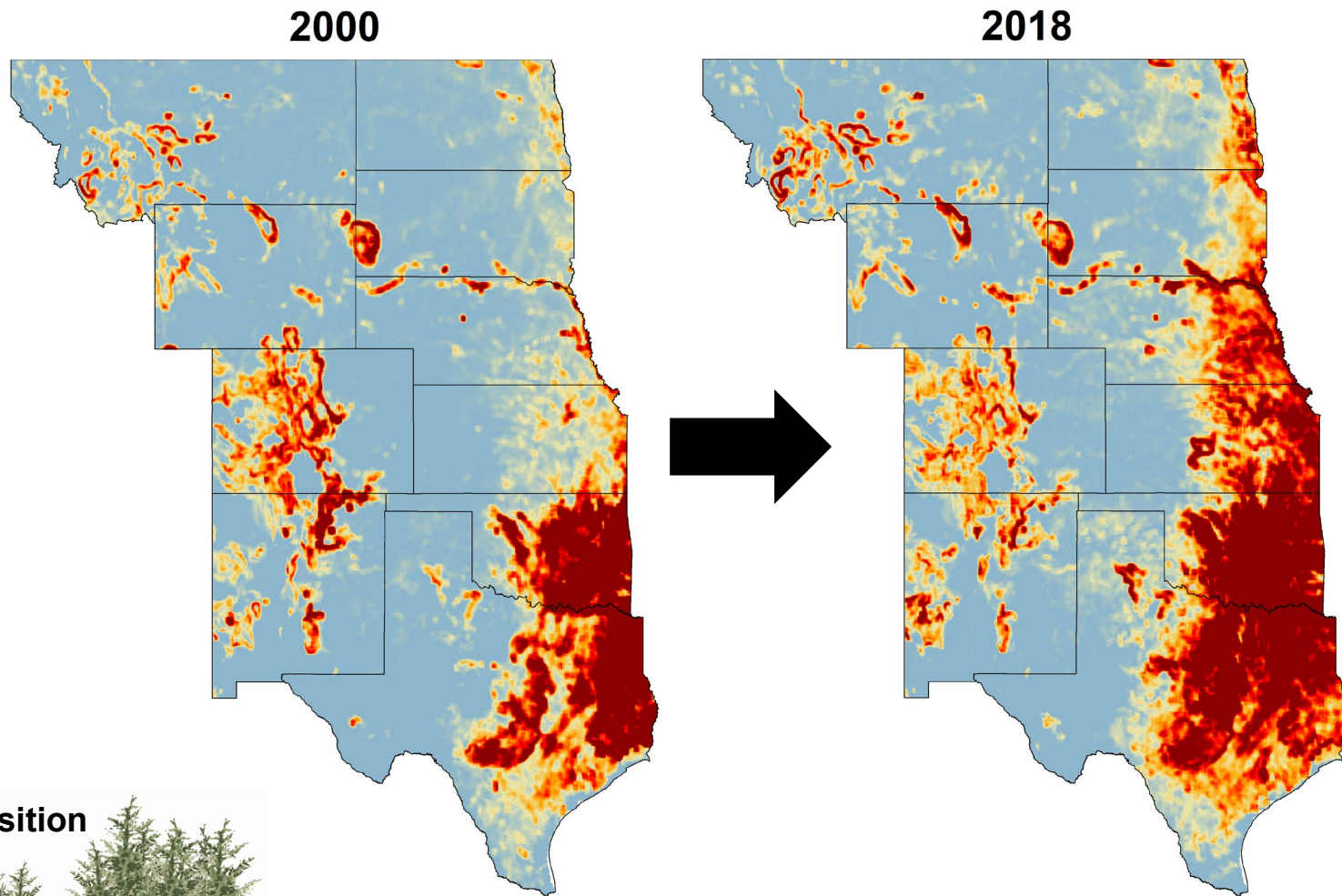
CRP enrollment increases pheasant abundance;
however the benefits of CRP are inhibited by trees



CRP enrollment increases pheasant abundance;
however the benefits of CRP are inhibited by trees



CRP enrollment increases pheasant abundance;
however the benefits of CRP are inhibited by trees



Economic Impact of Pheasant Hunting (2015-2019)

\$23.5 million/year

Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Census Bureau (2016)



PRIVATE PROPERTY

**NO HUNTING
NEXT 20 MILES**

**DON'T ASK
DON'T STOP**

Importance of Public Lands

- 3/5 upland hunters utilize public lands
- Availability of public lands is a top factor influencing nonresidents' decision to hunt in Nebraska
(Hunter Success Survey Data)
- Lack of publicly accessible lands was #1 barrier to waterfowl hunting participation in central U.S.
(Hinrichs, 2019)
- Access to land was the #1 barrier to upland and big game hunting participation in Nebraska
(Grams, 2018)



Open Fields and Waters Program
Hunting, Trapping & Fishing

Permitted

All Species & Seasons

By Walking Only

**DO NOT HUNT, TRAP OR FISH
BEYOND FIELD BOUNDARY**

This site has been enrolled to provide hunting, trapping and/or fishing opportunities with your Habitat Stamp funds. Federal Aid to Fish and Wildlife Restoration and Environmental Trust funds also may have been used.

NEBRASKA
- GAME PARKS -

The Nebraska
Environmental Trust



Respect the Landowner and the Land!

- **Annual, Per-Acre Payments**
- **Liability Protection**
- **Incentives for Habitat Improvements**

NEBRASKA
- GAME PARKS -



2021 - 2022

Thank you to all our valued partners who have helped provide public access opportunities in Nebraska.



PUBLIC ACCESS ATLAS

FOR WALK-IN HUNTING, TRAPPING, AND FISHING IN NEBRASKA



Open Fields and Waters Program
Hunting & Trapping Permitted
All Species & Seasons
By Walking Only
DO NOT HUNT, TRAP OR FISH BEYOND FIELD BOUNDARY
This area has been reserved for private property. Signs posted in this area are not to be removed. If you are unsure if you are in a reserved area, please contact the landowner. If you are unsure if you are in a reserved area, please contact the landowner.
NEBRASKA NWT
Respect the Landowner and the Land!

The Open Fields and Waters Program is a joint project of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and valued partners. This atlas is valid through July 31, 2022.

Funding support provided by:



Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.org

THE BERGGREN PLAN

NEBRASKA'S MEGA PLAN IMPROVING PHEASANT HUNTING

"We're all in!"



OUR MISSION:

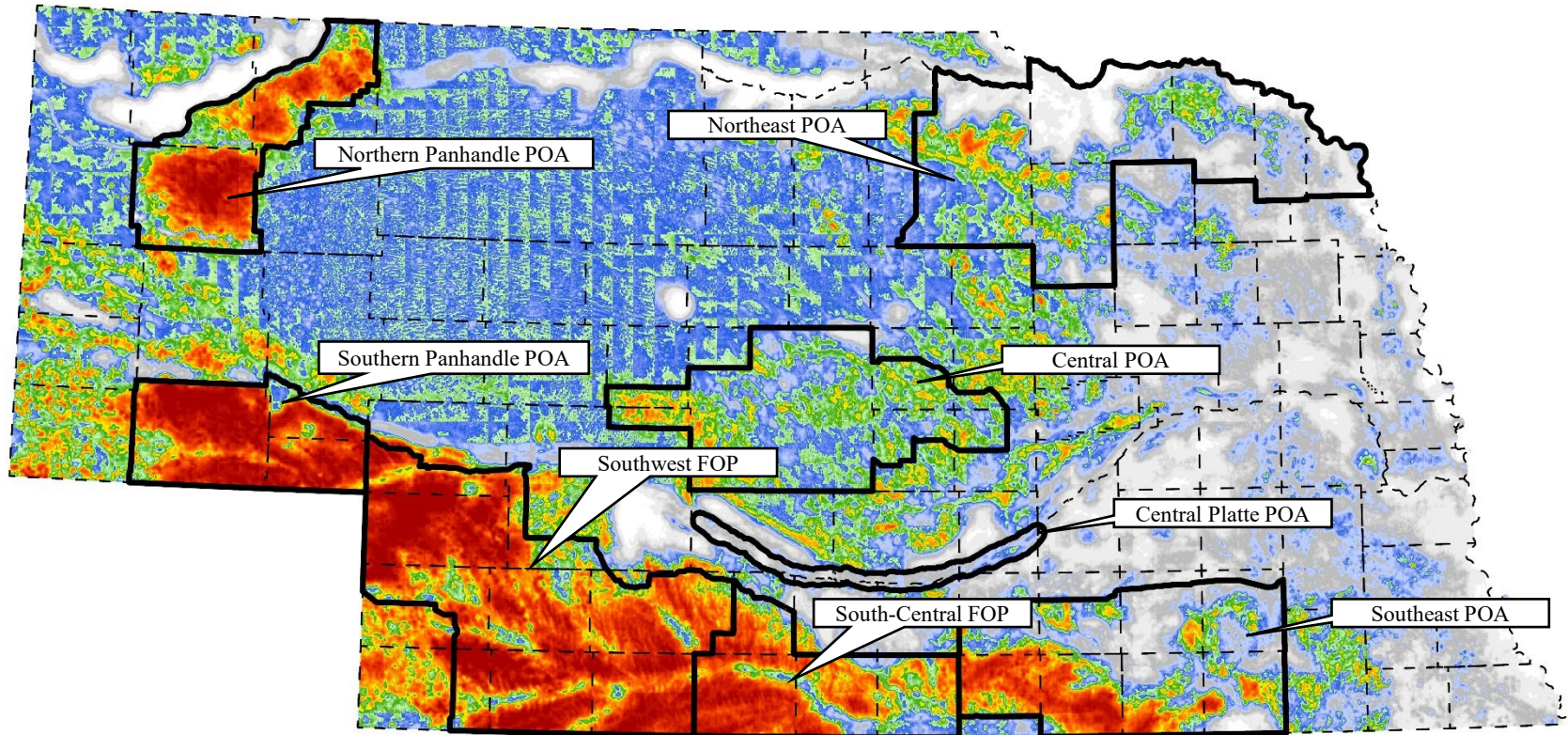
Produce the best pheasant hunting experiences for the largest number of people possible over the next five years

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- *We will consider all manageable aspects of the pheasant hunting experience, with habitat and hunter access remaining our cornerstone activities*
- *We will concentrate work where it will be most effective (i.e., where habitat, hunter access, and community support come together) based on sound science*
- *We will set realistic management targets and expectations, and use our financial and human resources as efficiently as possible to meet them*
- *We will foster strong partnerships with other public entities, private conservation organizations, and local communities in reaching our shared goals*

A TARGETED APPROACH...

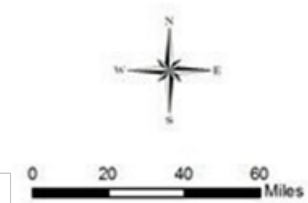
Nebraska Pheasant Suitability Model and Berggren Plan Priority Areas



Citation: Adapted from Jorgensen et al. 2014



□ Berggren Plan Priority Areas



THE BERGGREN PLAN

NEBRASKA'S MEGA PLAN
IMPROVING PHEASANT HUNTING

"We're all in!"

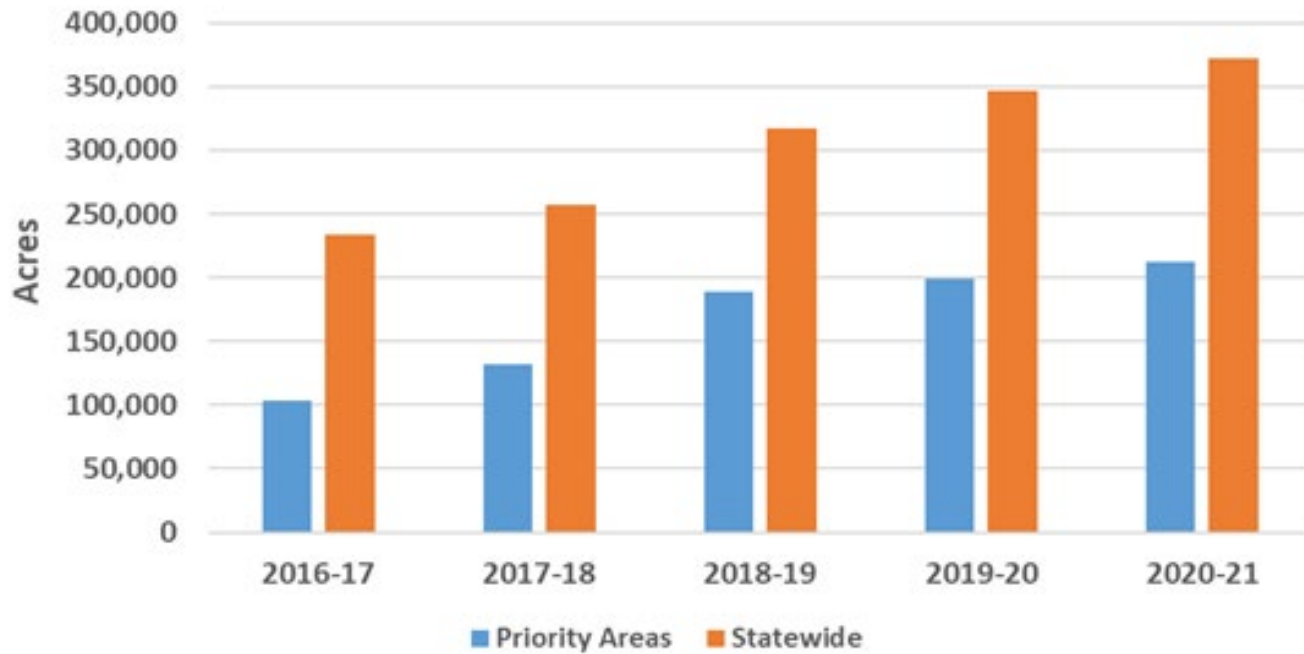


Berggren Plan 1.0 (2016-2020):

*Completed 2,434 projects with private landowners,
impacting over 216,500 acres of pheasant habitat*



Open Fields and Waters (OFW) Program Enrollment
(2016-2020)



Over The Past 5 Years...

- ✓ Increased Public Access in 7 of 8 Priority Areas
- ✓ Enrolled Additional >108K Acres Within Priority Areas (105% Increase)

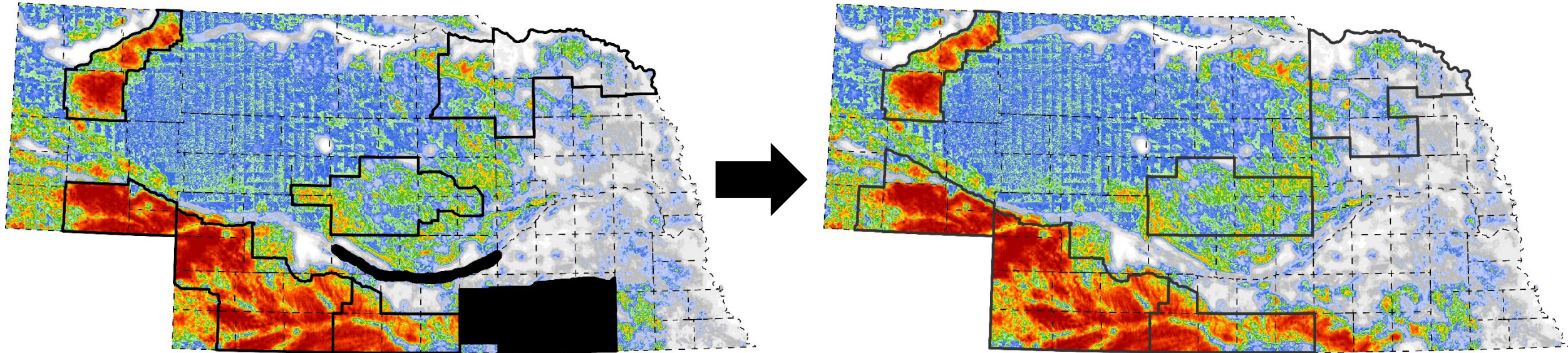
Current Statewide OFW Enrollment (>382K acres) is at All-Time High



A TARGETED APPROACH...

Berggren Plan

Berggren Plan 2.0



Citation: Adapted from Jorgensen et al. 2014

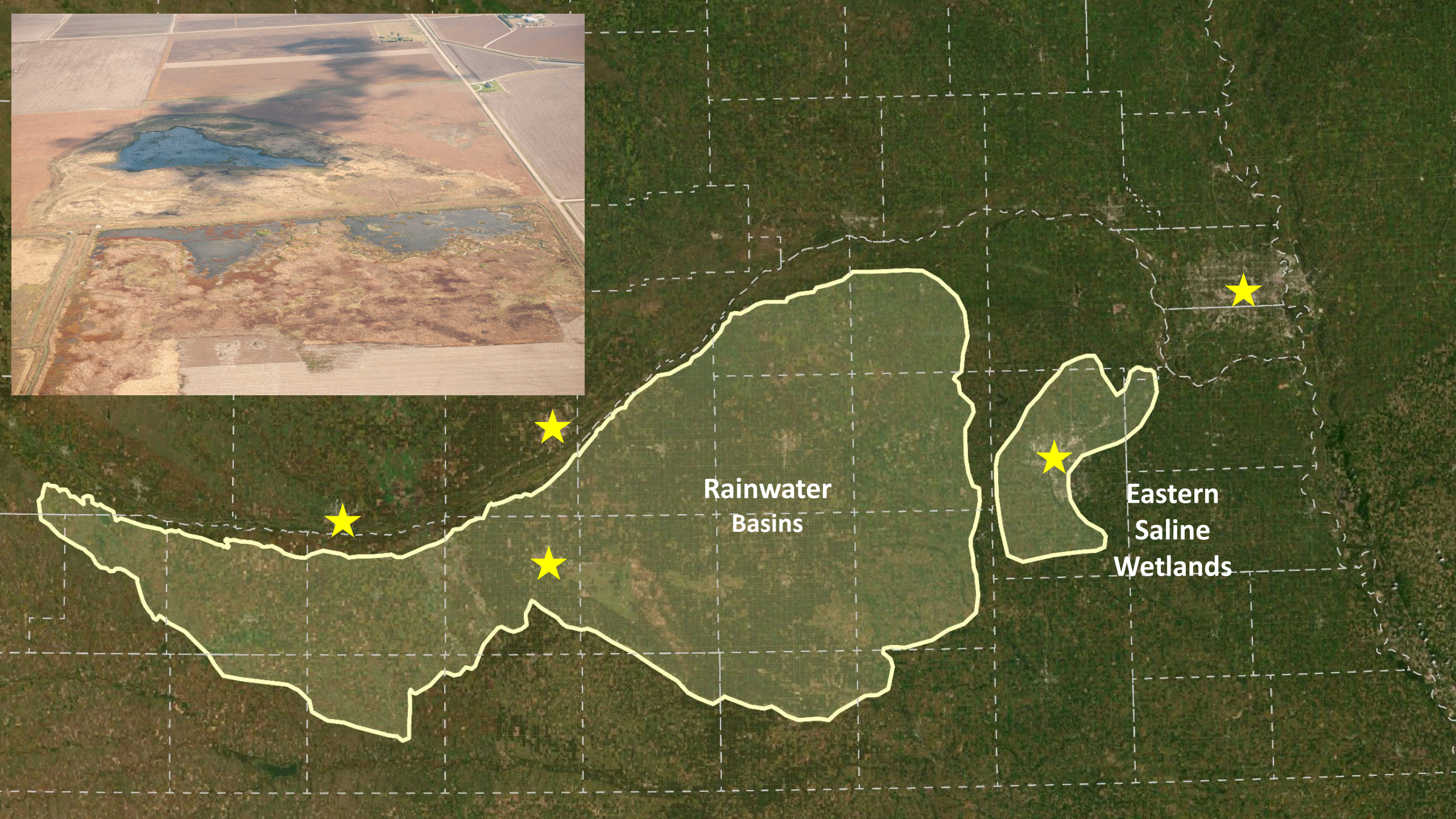


Increasing Habitat Value

□ Berggren Plan Priority Areas



0 20 40 60 Miles

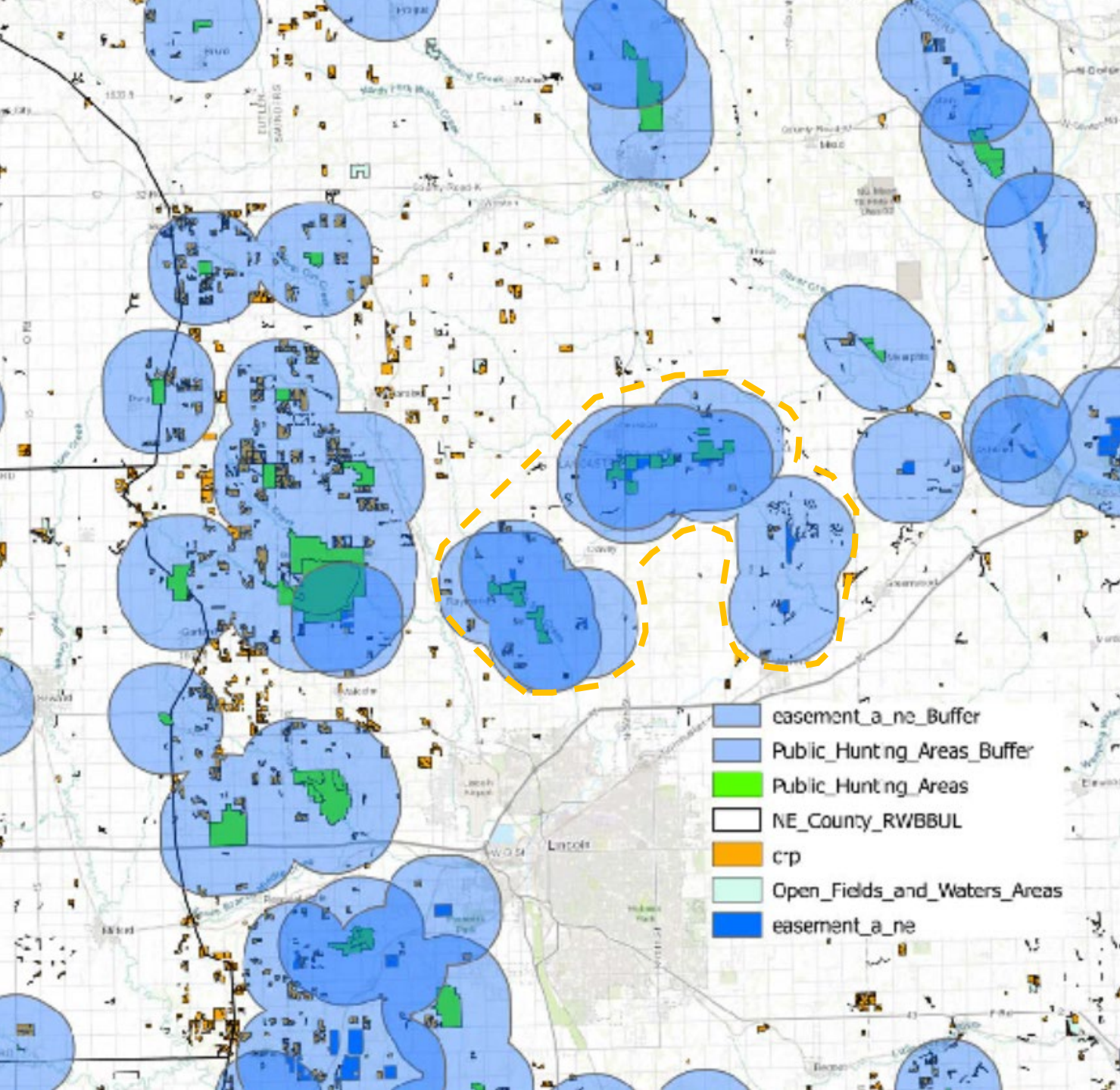


**Rainwater
Basins**

**Eastern
Saline
Wetlands**

FUTURE EFFORTS IN THE EASTERN SALINE WETLANDS

- Jack Sinn WMA (IN PROGRESS)
- Little Salt Creek WMA
- Little Salt Creek West WMA
- Little Salt Springs WMA
- Little Salt Fork Marsh Preserve WMA
- Helmuth Marsh Public Access Area
- Saline Meadows Public Access Area

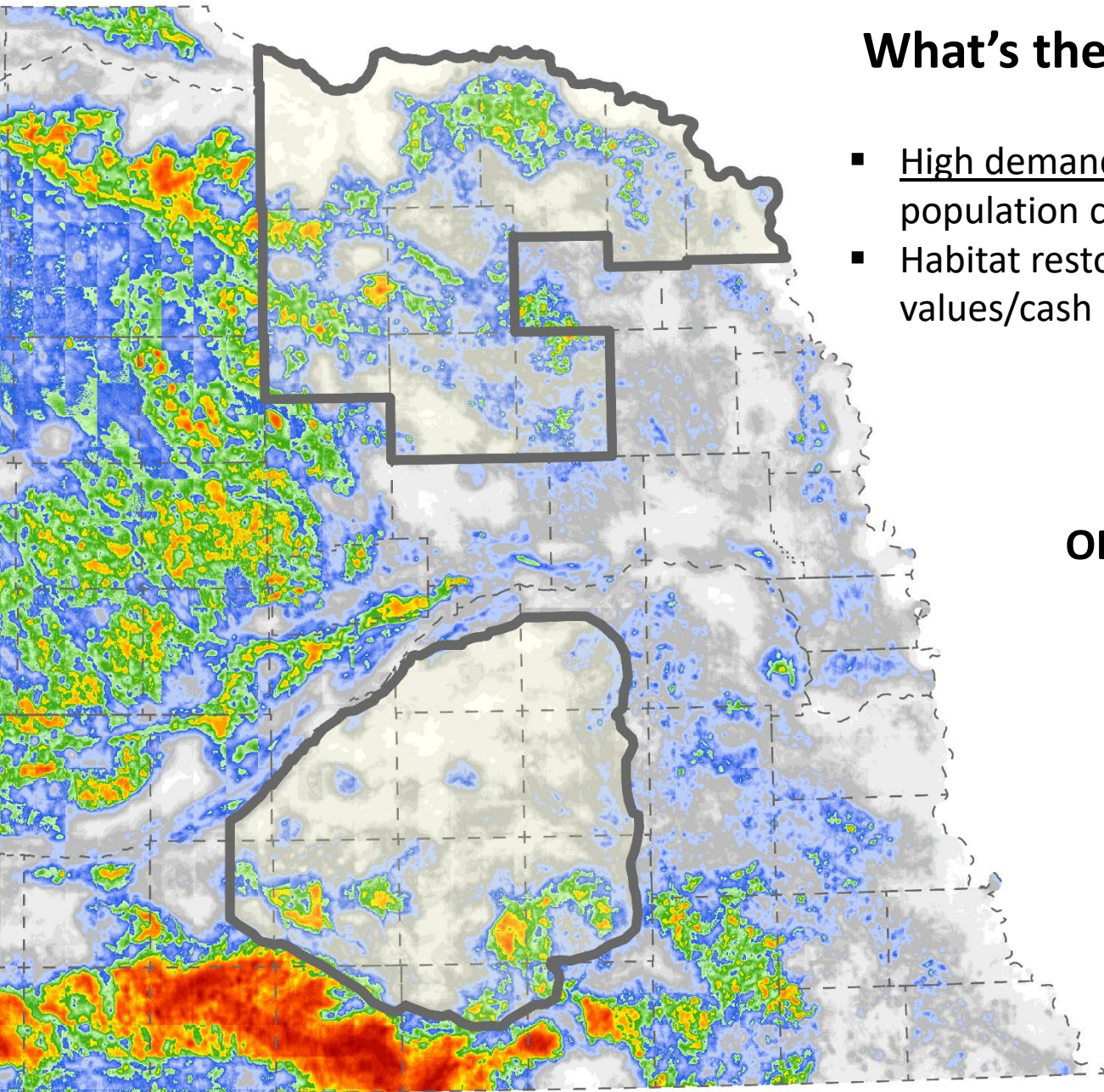


PRIVATE
LANDOWNERS



LOWER PLATTE SOUTH
natural resources district





What's the best way to restore pheasants "in the blue"?

- High demand for pheasant hunting opportunities near our state's population centers
- Habitat restoration is more costly in eastern Nebraska due to higher land values/cash rental rates

FUTURE EFFORTS MUST BE STRATEGIC!!!

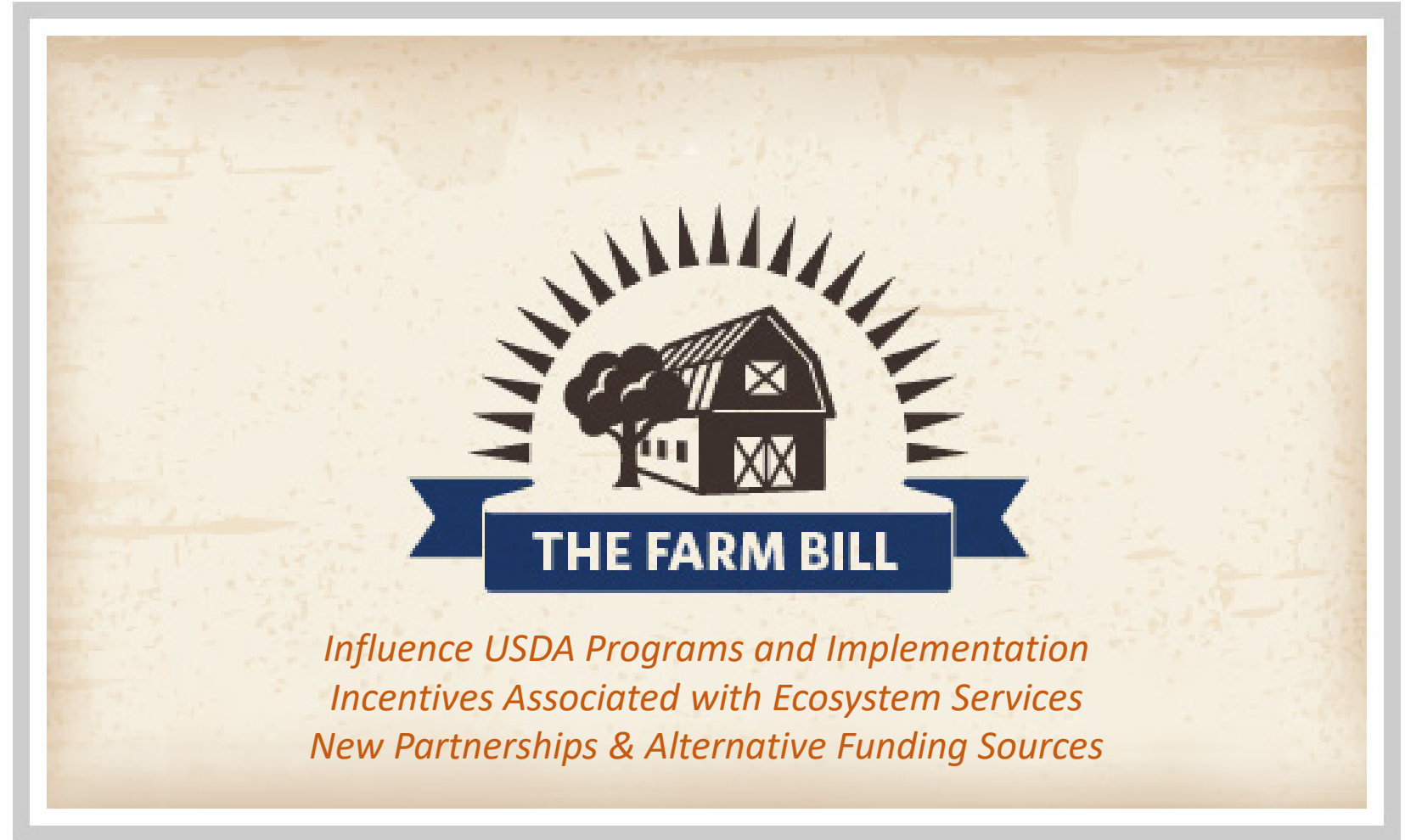
OBJECTIVES:

- Determine "minimum habitat thresholds"
 - *habitat density vs. pheasant abundance*
- Estimate "scale of effect"
 - *how does distance between patches affect pheasant abundance (and response)*
 - *determine value of individual habitat patches*
- Model population responses under varying levels of available habitat

= TARGETED CONSERVATION DELIVERY

UPDATES TO STRATEGIES & TACTICS

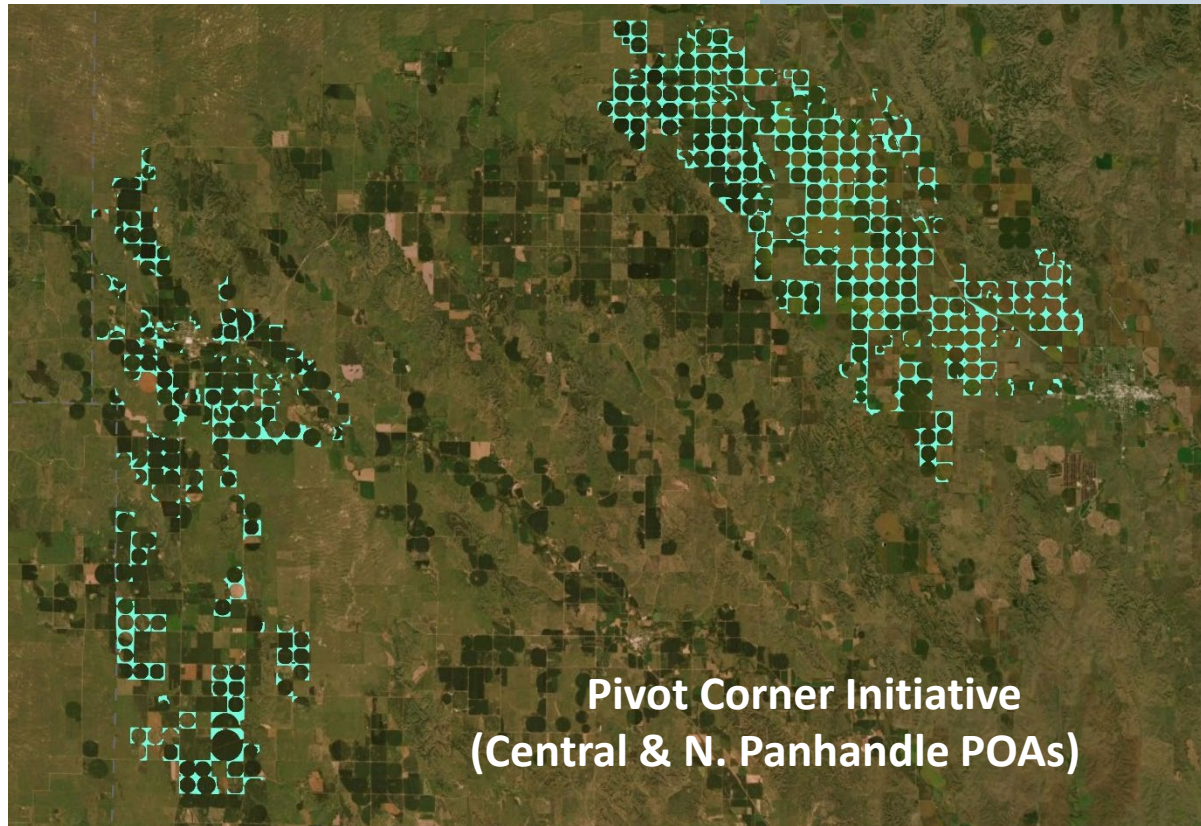
➤ Funding and Policy Environment



UPDATES TO STRATEGIES & TACTICS

- Funding and Policy Environment
- Manageable Factors Affecting:
 - Pheasant Abundance

Incentivize CRP & Pheasant-Friendly Practices
Maintain & Expand Partnerships
Enhance Habitat & Management Capacity on High-Priority WMAs



UPDATES TO STRATEGIES & TACTICS

➤ Funding and Policy Environment

➤ Manageable Factors Affecting:

- Pheasant Abundance
- Hunter Access to Land

2021 - 2022

PUBLIC ACCESS ATLAS

— FOR WALK-IN HUNTING, TRAPPING, —
AND FISHING IN NEBRASKA

The Open Fields and Waters Program is a joint project of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and valued partners. This atlas is valid through July 31, 2022.

Funding support provided by:

Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.org

Increase Public Access on Private Lands (OFW)
Strategic Plan for Public Access
Facilitate Additional Access on Partner Lands
Promote Public Hunting Opportunities



UPDATES TO STRATEGIES & TACTICS

- Funding and Policy Environment
- Manageable Factors Affecting:
 - Pheasant Abundance
 - Hunter Access to Land
 - Pheasant Hunter Numbers

*R3 Programs & Partnerships
Opportunities for Youth & Novice Hunters*



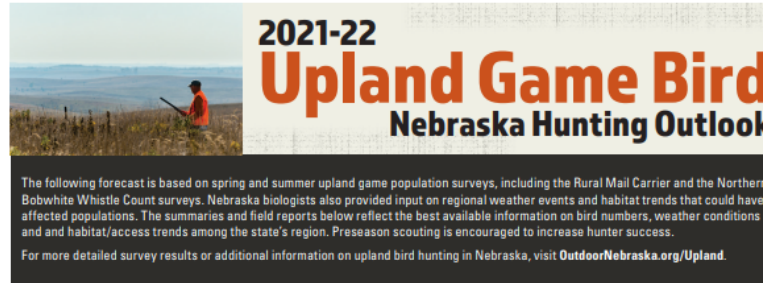
UPDATES TO STRATEGIES & TACTICS

➤ Funding and Policy Environment

➤ Manageable Factors Affecting:

- Pheasant Abundance
- Hunter Access to Land
- Pheasant Hunter Numbers
- Hunter Expectations

*Upland Forecast
Promotion & Outreach
Resources for Hunters*



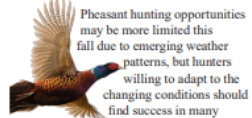
2021-22 Upland Game Bird Nebraska Hunting Outlook

The following forecast is based on spring and summer upland game population surveys, including the Rural Mail Carrier and the Northern Bobwhite Whistle Count surveys. Nebraska biologists also provided input on regional weather events and habitat trends that could have affected populations. The summaries and field reports below reflect the best available information on bird numbers, weather conditions and and habitat/access trends among the state's region. Preseason scouting is encouraged to increase hunter success.

For more detailed survey results or additional information on upland bird hunting in Nebraska, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/Upland.

STATEWIDE OVERVIEW

Ring-Necked Pheasant

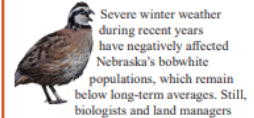


Pheasant hunting opportunities may be more limited this fall due to emerging weather patterns, but hunters willing to adapt to the changing conditions should find success in many areas. Compared to 2020, spring pheasant counts were 29% and 35% higher in the Northeast and Southeast regions, respectively. Notable declines, however, were observed elsewhere, especially in the Southwest and Panhandle, which experienced extreme drought last fall/winter.

Abundant precipitation during late spring helped much of the state recover. Overall, nesting conditions were favorable early on and brood observations throughout the state, although variable, indicate some production occurred despite the hot, dry conditions that commenced in mid-June.

This year's statewide pheasant index during the July RMCS was down 14% statewide, but hunters are cautioned that dry conditions often inhibit roadside observations. Densities again should be highest this fall in portions of the Southwest and Panhandle regions. Preseason scouting is recommended due to changing weather and habitat conditions. Emergency haying and grazing of Conservation Reserve Program lands was authorized throughout much of the state and likely will affect some CRP tracts open to walk-in hunting through the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Open Fields and Waters Program.

Northern Bobwhite

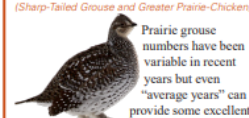


Severe winter weather during recent years have negatively affected Nebraska's bobwhite populations, which remain below long-term averages. Still, biologists and land managers remain optimistic that the favorable nesting and brood-rearing conditions this summer throughout much of the species' core range in south-central and southeast Nebraska will help quail populations rebound.

Statewide, bobwhite counts during the July RMCS and Whistle Count Survey were down 10-22% compared to 2020. Some adult mortality was expected following the extended periods of snow cover and extreme freezing temperatures in February 2021. Fortunately, no mass mortalities were reported, and regional declines appear to have been less severe across southern Nebraska, including the Republican, Southeast, and West Platte regions. This year's fall population largely will depend on production during the nesting season, which is underway. Biologists and private landowners have observed good numbers of broods throughout the summer where quality habitat exists within the core range. Timely rains have maintained relatively good habitat conditions across much of southern Nebraska and appears to have encouraged additional re-nesting during late summer.

Overall, hunters should expect to find numbers similar to last year across south-central and southeastern Nebraska but likely will find fewer coveys elsewhere in the state.

Prairie Grouse



Prairie grouse numbers have been variable in recent years but even "average years" can provide some excellent hunting opportunities. Spring lek counts were variable but did not indicate any major losses during winter.

The Sandhills were in better shape this spring, in terms of residual cover, than areas further west and south that experienced prolonged drought in 2020. Despite abnormally high temps this summer, July rains helped maintain suitable brood-rearing cover across the Sandhills. Brood observations have been relatively limited but indicated that some production had occurred in most areas of the state. Brood sizes have been on the smaller side, which may indicate that heat stress affected brood survival. Although a few young broods were observed late this summer, re-nesting appears to be more limited this year.

The Sandhills continue to offer some of the best hunting opportunities for chickens and sharpshins. Conditions are becoming increasingly dry throughout Nebraska's prairie grouse range and, if it continues, the cover may become sparse in some areas.



Visit us at: OutdoorNebraska.org



2021 Upland Game Bird Survey Results

RING-NECKED PHEASANT SURVEYS:



Region	% Change from*:		Overall Abundance Rank (1=Best)	Top Counties (no particular order)
	2020 July RMCS	5-yr Ave. (2016-2020) July RMCS		
Panhandle	-7	-27	1	Cheyenne, Deuel, Box Butte, Morrill
Southwest	-45	-36	2	Chase, Hayes, Hitchcock, Perkins
Northeast	0	0	3	Antelope, Cedar, Dixon, Knox
Sandhills	+48	-22	4	Blaine, Cherry, Grant
Southeast	-17	-29	5	Clay, Fillmore, Webster, York
Central	+5	-51	6	Groesbeck, Howard, Sherman
Statewide	-14	-21		

NORTHERN BOBWHITE SURVEYS:



Region	% Change from*:			Overall Abundance Rank (1=Best)	Top Counties (no particular order)
	2020 RMCS	2020 Whistle Count Survey	5-yr Ave. Whistle Count Survey		
Republican	-38	-8	-28	1	Franklin, Furnas, Harlan, Red Willow
Southeast	+78	-8	-42	2	Gage, Jefferson, Johnson, Pawnee
East Central	-45	-16	-20	3	Butler, Seward, Thayer
West Platte	-45	-6	-21	4	Gosper, Frontier, Lincoln
Northeast	-27	-31	-29	5	Antelope, Pierce, Stanton
North Central	-38	-17	-65	6	Greeley, Howard, Sherman
Statewide	-22	-10	-35		

* For low-ranked regions, large percent changes might not translate into noticeable changes in hunting conditions.

UPDATES TO STRATEGIES & TACTICS

➤ Funding and Policy Environment

➤ Manageable Factors Affecting:

- Pheasant Abundance
- Hunter Access to Land
- Pheasant Hunter Numbers
- Hunter Expectations

➤ Habitat/Access Goals

➤ Research & Priority Information Needs

➤ Pheasant Communication Action Plan

➤ Completed Tactics from Berggren Plan 1.0 (NEW)

➤ Peer-Reviewed Publications Derived from Commission-Funded Pheasant Research (NEW)

Table A3. Habitat and access goals (2021-2025) for the South-Central Focus on Pheasants (SCFOP) Area.

Practice	5-year Goals (Acres)	Annual Goals (Acres)
New CRP ^a	5,000	1,000
CRP Re-Enrollment ^b	11,520	2,304
CRP Mid-Contract Management ^c	8,563.5	1,712.7
Early Successional Habitat Management	500	100
Tree Removal/Edge-Feathering	2,500	500
Prescribed Fire	2,500	500
Short-Term Set-Aside	1,000	200
Shrub Plantings (non-CRP)	n=125	n=25
Total Habitat	31,583.5	6,316.7

^a Represents 15.5% increase compared to current (2020) CRP enrollment (32,306 ac)

^b Represents 100% retention of general/continuous CRP acres scheduled to expire from 2021-2025

^c Represents 50% of total CRP acres due for Mid-Contract Management from 2021-2025 (17,127 ac)

Practice	Available CRP (Acres)	CRP Acres Enrolled in OFW (2020-21)	5-year Goal (Acres)
Public Access (CRP) ^d	32,306	7,790.8 (24.1%)	30% of available ^d
Public Access (Stubble) ^e			4,000 ^e

^d Represents a "moving goal" based on available general/continuous CRP acreage

^e Represents a 8.3% increase compared to current (2020-21) enrollment in OFW (3,695.2 ac)

- Draft of Updated Plan
- Slides of Presentation
- Public Comment (Dec 15th)

