



The Izaak Walton League of America

Defenders of Soil, Air, Woods, Waters, and Wildlife

April 15, 2024

Re: Comments on the Draft SD Ring-necked Pheasant Action Plan

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks
523 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501

The South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America (Division) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Draft South Dakota Ring-necked Pheasant Action Plan for 2024-2028. This plan will guide pheasant management in the state for the next 5 years.

The Division agrees with the plan's stated assessment of the loss of habitat in the state. South Dakota is losing critical pheasant nesting and wintering habitat to grassland and wetland conversion at an alarming rate. We're also seeing the destruction of miles and miles of shelterbelts. These losses take away vital nesting and winter thermal cover.

Over 80% of South Dakota is privately owned. The Division supports collaborating with private landowners to improve nesting and wintering habitats and to renovate woody habitat. This will help provide pheasants and other wildlife the cover to survive and successfully reproduce.

Objective 1

The Division enthusiastically supports increasing public access for hunters. This can be accomplished through voluntary enrollments in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) by landowners in the James River and Big Sioux River watersheds, and through additional cooperative agreements in the Walk In Acres (WIA), and the **Controlled Hunting Access** programs.

Providing free public access to quality habitat to the average hunter is essential for the future of pheasant hunting in South Dakota. The vast majority of South Dakotans cannot afford to pay the high costs charged by commercial hunting operations to simply enjoy a day in the field with family and friends.

Objective 2

We support enhancing woody habitat and improving nesting and brood rearing habitats on the state's Game Production Areas (GPAs). These areas are heavily used by the public every year. Providing quality year-round habitat on GPAs will enable the average hunter a chance to harvest pheasants throughout the season.

Objective 3

We vigorously support the effort to strive for at least one million acres of undisturbed Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres in the state. CRP has proven to be extremely beneficial to the state's wildlife, especially pheasants and waterfowl. CRP improves water and air quality by reducing soil erosion. We support the restoration of previously drained wetlands in

CRP to provide additional winter cover for wildlife. We also support restoring converted grassland back to grass wherever possible.

Brood Survey

The Division strongly urges GFP to restart the pheasant brood survey that was discontinued in 2020. This previous annual survey was abruptly ended despite widespread public support for the effort. We believe the brood survey not only provides a look at existing pheasant numbers, but more importantly, it provides a method to see which areas of the state need nesting and wintering habitat enhancement to boost pheasant numbers in those areas.

Nest Predator Bounty Program

The Division renews our objection to the nest predator bounty program. This effort has spent millions of license dollars without any proven, science-based results, which show any increase in pheasant or waterfowl numbers.

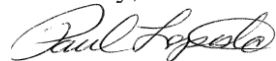
We believe more beneficial results for pheasants and the future of hunting would be derived from those funds be spent either in increased youth outdoor activities or by enhancing nesting and wintering habitat in the state. We strongly urge you to end the nest predator bounty program immediately.

Summary

The South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America thanks you for this opportunity to comment on the Draft South Dakota Ring-necked Pheasant Action Plan. Pheasants are a topic of high importance to the members of the Division and to many South Dakotans.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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Regional Conservation Coordinator

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