

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

UPLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT

(acre)

CODE 645

Texas Supplement, Zone 1

RING-NECKED PHEASANT

HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

FOOD

Ring-necked pheasants need a high quality, year-round supply of food that includes up to 70% domestic grain --- corn, grain sorghum and small grain. High pheasant populations in the Texas High Plains are normally linked to irrigated cropland. Adult birds may consume up to 6 pounds of grain a month. During spring and summer months, insects and green plant material will be utilized in their diet.

COVER

Ring-necked pheasants need good quality herbaceous cover year-round. Cover is needed for protection from weather and predators, for nesting, for roosting and for loafing. These different types of cover are provided by non-farmed playas, weedy field borders, areas around old homesteads, native grass fields, growing agricultural crops, crop residues and CRP fields. All of these cover types must be adequately distributed and of sufficient quality

for ring-necked pheasant to prosper. The two most critical types of cover on the Texas High Plains are nesting cover and winter cover.

Nesting cover should be at least 24 inches high and areas should be no smaller than 10 acres in size. Good cover is a combination of grass and some taller forbs. These sites must not be disturbed from April through July.

Winter cover should be dense vegetation. Thick dormant vegetation in playas, windbreaks and dense stands in CRP fields are good examples of winter cover.

Roosting cover can be grass, crop residue or similar plants tall enough to conceal the birds. It also needs to be no smaller than 10 acres so predators can not hunt the entire area and find the sleeping birds.

Loafing cover can be areas that offer shade and allow wind flow.

WATER

Ring-necked pheasants utilize standing water. In addition, they are able to use water from

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insects, green plant material and dew. They can survive without standing water, in many cases.

HABITAT ARRANGEMENT AND SIZE

All habitat elements should be close enough within the home range to allow for safe use. The home range can be as large as 1000 acres. A good mixture of habitat components is 40% corn or grain sorghum, 25% small grains, 12% playas, 20% odd areas and perennial grasses and 3% roadsides, fence rows and shelterbelts.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

CROPLAND MANAGEMENT

Following harvest, grain crop residues should not be disturbed during the fall and winter months for corn and grain sorghum. Wheat residues should be left undisturbed during the summer months. Leaving strips (4 to 8 rows) of unharvested grain also provides extra food and cover which is especially valuable in late winter. The standing stubble of grain crops provides cover for loafing, travel and protection from weather.

The practice of limited, or minimum, tillage is ideal for ring-necked pheasant management. This practice results in continuous vegetative cover on the surface of the land and increases both year-round food and cover. Chemicals must be applied according to all label directions to reduce any potential hazard to wildlife.

The practice of crop rotation allows cover to be maintained on some part of the cropland at all times. For example, if corn and wheat are grown on the same farm, there should be waste corn for food in the fall and winter and waste wheat for food in the summer. The corn will provide insects and cover during the summer while wheat will provide insects, cover and green matter during the winter and spring.

GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

Establishing or managing existing perennial grass is very desirable. Optimum conditions can be realized when vegetation consists of moderately dense perennial grass or grass/forb mixtures. Native grass/forb/legume mixtures are highly recommended. Prescribed Grazing must be carried out.

CRP land can be managed to benefit ring-necked pheasants. Practices, such as prescribed burning, where portions of the field are burned once every 4 or 5 years improve forb production and create different habitat stages, can be used. Different stages of growth created by burning make a natural habitat mosaic comprised of some bare ground, lush green plant material, insects and shade adjacent to more open areas. Shredding portions of the field regularly will also improve CRP by creation of areas for brood-rearing activities in the summer. Burning and shredding should not be carried out during the nesting season. Many CRP fields can be improved by the addition of 10-15 % woody vegetation.

PLAYA MANAGEMENT

Playa basins should not be grazed, burned or shredded. They must have dense residues at the start of the nesting season. Playas provide prime nesting sites and winter cover. The value of playas cannot be overemphasized since they are many times the only source of quality vegetative cover available.

ODD AREA MANAGEMENT

Old farm headquarters, fencerows, tailwater recovery pits and equipment yards usually grow annual vegetation. These areas of annual vegetation should be maintained by not plowing, mowing or burning. They are valuable for providing escape, loafing and winter cover.

County roadsides generally have very little cover for ring-necked pheasants. In order to meet cover requirements during critical times such as winter and summer months, areas containing

good volunteer stands of herbaceous vegetation can be deliberately protected by being designated as "no-mow" zones at ¼ mile intervals.

Planting of new shelterbelts or protection of existing shelterbelts will provide excellent thermal cover during winter storm periods, and they also provide travel lanes and good loafing areas during hot summer months.

REFERENCES

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State Wildlife Biologist

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Date

APPROVAL

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FOOD AND COVER PLANTS VALUABLE FOR RING-NECKED PHEASANTS

PLANTS	FOOD	COVER
<i>ANNUALS</i>		
Amaranth		x
Corn	x	x
Sweetclover	x	x
Grain Sorghum	x	x
Pearl Millet	x	x
Forage Sorghum	x	x
Soybeans	x	
Sunflowers, including native	x	x
Wheat	x	x
Smartweed		x
Kochia		x
<i>PERENNIALS</i>		
Alfalfa	x	x
Johnsongrass	x	x
Little Bluestem		x
Maximilian Sunflower	x	x
Switchgrass	x	x
Sideoats Grama		x
Honeysuckle		x
Native Plum		x
Skunkbush Sumac		x
Smartweed		x