

Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative

2020 Annual Report



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What is the Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative (MPRI)?

The MPRI is a conservation initiative to restore and enhance Michigan pheasant habitat, populations and hunting opportunities on private and public lands. The MPRI works by acquiring state and federal resources to assist landowners within cooperatives in improving wildlife habitat on their property and by improving habitat on selected state game and recreation areas and other public and private lands. MPRI partners work to secure staffing to accomplish habitat improvement, hunter access, education and outreach, hunter recruitment, retention and reactivation and population monitoring goals.

Pheasant Cooperatives

Focusing on private lands, pheasant co-ops serve as a way to connect neighboring landowners and hunters on a number of conservation efforts to help restore wild pheasant populations.

The six-year Michigan Wildlife Cooperatives program came to an end in 2020. Before the program's conclusion in late summer, the coordinator was able to add **95 new participants**, which encompassed **26,000 acres** enrolled.



Prior to the Covid-19 standstill, the cooperative coordinator participated in a variety of different events including the Pheasants Forever and National Wild Turkey Federation State Conventions. The coordinator was a guest speaker at each focusing on education and recruitment, retention and reactivation topics.

The coordinator also facilitated partnerships with local Farm Bill Biologists and landowners to participate in pheasant crowing counts throughout several MPRI counties in the spring.

Finally, a program report was compiled and distributed to more than 200 members to highlight the accomplishments of cooperatives throughout its existence.

Grassland and Wetland Habitat Improvement

The MPRI Coalition works cooperatively to improve grassland and wetland habitat for pheasant nesting, brood rearing and wintering. This work is completed on both private and public lands. The pandemic impacted the amount of habitat work coalition partners were able to accomplish in 2020.

State Game Area	Grassland Acres Enhanced or Restored	Food Plot Acres Planted	Wetland Acres Enhanced
Adams	23	0	0
Allegan	21	297	0
Cornish	15	28	0
Crow Island	0	20	0
Gordon Guyer	26	0	0
Lake Hudson State Rec. Area	230	0	0
Maple River	15	42	0
Nayanquing Point	50	0	0
Pinconning Twp.	30	0	0
Rose Lake	4	28	0
Sharonville	49	11	0
Shiawassee River	40	140	0
Verona and Thumb Mini State Game Areas	1,460	200	0
Totals	1,963	766	0

Coalition Organization	Grassland Acres Established or Restored	Food Plot Acres Planted	Wetland Acres Protected or Restored
Ducks Unlimited	0	0	409
National Wild Turkey Federation	4,764	0	0
Pheasants Forever	2,965	8,556	35
US Fish and Wildlife Service	454	0	546
Totals	8,183	8,556	990

Seed Drill Planting

Despite the challenges faced in 2020 with spending restrictions, working from home and other barriers to work, seed drills were used to plant **2,679 acres** of new or enhanced wildlife habitat. **1,661 of those acres (62.1%)** were planted to warm season native grasses and pollinator seed mixes, **106.8 acres (3.9%)** were planted to cool season grasses, and **911.2 acres (34%)** were planted to food plot or pasture mixes. This is the lowest number of acres that have been planted with the drills since 2014. The drills visited a total of **241 sites** across southern Michigan this planting season. To date 6 old drills have been replaced with 6 new ones and 8 drills were repaired. We are looking forward to a return to normal operations in 2021 (hopefully).

More Land for Hunting

The DNR acquired **444 acres** of additional land for public access to wildlife-based recreation. The brand new Pottersville State Game Area will provide wildlife habitat with the potential for excellent pheasant habitat and pheasant hunting. The purchase of this land was made possible by the Natural Resources Trust Fund and coalition partners, the National Wild Turkey Federation who provided additional financial assistance for the purchase.

Farm Bill Programs

The 2018 Farm Bill provided expanded opportunities under the Conservation Reserve Program. A competitive General CRP sign-up is required to occur on an annual basis under the new farm bill along with an annual CRP Grasslands sign-up. 2020 marked the 35th anniversary of the CRP, activities and sign-up opportunities that occurred during 2020 were:

- General sign-up 54 with increased opportunities for enrollment of wildlife habitat through the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiatives, of which Michigan had three (Southern Michigan Grasslands, Native Pollinator Habitat and the Southern Michigan Pheasant and Monarch Recovery Effort). Michigan had historic high acceptance rates of offers in this sign-up with 100% of CRP SAFE offers being accepted and an **overall acceptance rate of 94%**.
- Continuous CRP sign-up 53 which focused primarily on water quality within the new CLEAR (Clean Lakes, Estuaries, and Rivers) initiative.
- CRP Grassland sign-up 202 which had over **15,000 acres** being accepted here in Michigan!
- The CLEAR30 pilot allowed producers an option to re-enroll expiring water quality practices in a 30-year CRP contract.
- Continuous and General CRP sign-ups 55 and 56 are ongoing. Michigan USDA Service Centers are reporting steady interest in these CRP opportunities.

There were some challenges for CRP in 2020, for soil rental rates and certain incentives were lowered. The cost of native grass establishment caused some participants to terminate offered contracted acreage once they realized the upfront out of pocket costs required for such establishment.

Governor Whitmer's fiscal year 2021 budget includes support for \$10.0 million in one-time and \$0.6 million in on-going funding to support the implementation of on-farm conservation practices to protect Michigan's ground and surface water in targeted watershed areas under the Michigan Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The Michigan CREP was suspended in May of 2016, and this proposed reinvestment would allow for new enrollment into this focused CRP partnership effort. The \$10 million one-time funding will make Michigan eligible for federal matching funds to implement conservation practices and support land rental payments for participating producers. The \$0.6 million will be used to provide outreach, education, and research grants in the targeted watershed areas.



Recruiting New Hunters

The number of R3 events held in 2020 were limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. The R3 Coordinators held several classes and events in early 2020 and then had to cancel and postpone many once COVID-19 arrived. The coordinators were successful in developing safety plans and procedures and were able to start hosting events and classes again in late summer.

Pheasants Forever organized six Pheasant Fridays with **136 youth** attendees and three family fun nights with **75 youth** and **45 adults**. PF also held three Learn to Wing Shoot events with **42 adults**, four youth pheasant hunts and shooting events with **135 youth** and two Women on the Wing pheasant hunts with **14 women** attending.

National Wild Turkey Federation's efforts included **41 events** that involved **1,725 shooters**, creating **235 new hunters**. They held 11 mentored hunts for turkey, deer, upland birds and small game, hosted ten Wheelin' Sportsmen mentored hunts and one Women in the Outdoors event. NWTf also held 3 Learn to Hunt Pheasant Events and 2 Learn to Hunt Turkey Events and conducted 13 state park JAKES Take Aim BB gun shooting events that introduced **488 shooters** to the activity. Finally, NWTf created a Beginning Wing Shooting 101 class at Rose Lake Shooting Range for new clay target shooters and they also made some short social media videos with Learn to Hunt content.

Though 2020 provided it's share of challenges, the good news is that the number of licensed hunters in Michigan **rose about 5%** and the Department is working to retain these new licensees in 2021.



Adopt-a-Game-Area

It was a tough year for habitat work with the COVID shutdown keeping contractors off of State Game Areas until the last couple weeks of the planting season. The Adopt-a-Game-Area Program/Enbridge habitat numbers for the year are as follows:

Grassland establishment: **32 acres**

Grassland improvement: **149 acres**

Fundraising was equally difficult, especially through the second and third quarters which saw many philanthropic foundations freeze their budgets and suspend established grant programs. New funds totaled **\$200,909** received to restore and improve grassland habitat on Michigan public lands.

We built **7 new kiosks** this year which will be installed in 2021.

Grasslands are Great!

The pandemic limited the Grasslands are Great! communications sent from the coalition through DNR channels, as only priority communications about COVID-19 were sent by the state for several months. In 2020, we promoted the Adopt-a-Game Area program in the DNR's Wildtalk Podcast ads and in two press releases, promoted the fall pheasant hunting seasons, and issued one Grasslands are Great story featuring Cooperatives and Farm Bill Biologists. Additionally, we helped create the 2019 annual report and issued a press release alerting the public to this MPRI publication.