Updates From the Field:

**CRP Diversity Seeding in NW Minnesota Thanks to WLI Funding**

When landowners in Pennington County talked to their local Farm Bill Biologist expressing their concerns about monarch populations declining and wanting to enhance their CRP to help, a new project was formed with the Working Lands Initiative (WLI) funding. These funds were part of the Local Technical Teams (LTT), made up of local resource managers using DNR funding for prairie related projects. The money is very flexible, so it was a good way to cover projects that may not be covered in other ways. Partners involved in the local technical teams include: DNR, SWCD, BWSR NRCS, USFWS, TNC and PF.

The CRP site was 73 acres, but the LTT decided to do a diversity seeding on 17.2 acres of the field, so that the site could be looked at as a demonstration site where you could see both a normal CRP mix and an enhanced mix. A 28 species mix was developed with help from DNR, BWSR, NRCS and SWCD. In June of 2015, the site was disked and the mix was seeded in.

Two years in, the site is showing a lot of diversity and there’s a clear difference in the quality of habitat. Visiting the site each year, there have been more bird sightings on the site in the enhanced area.

Completing this project has paved the way for more CRP enhancement work, and a second CRP site was seeded this past June in Pennington County. The site was seeded to a 13 species mix at a cost of $25,560, with CRP cost share and PIP covering a large part of the cost. The WLI funding paid for nearly $8,000 of the project. The site is 154 acres and located in the prairie core near state land. It will be exciting to see what develops here!

*Article and photos courtesy of Jill Fejszes, PF FBB
Cover Crops and Wildlife

Minnesota farmers are increasing their use of cover crops to benefit both their ag operations and to support conservation here at home, and there is good reason for that. Many benefits to agricultural operations have been shown, but are cover crops benefitting our local wildlife as well?

**Agronomic Benefits of Cover Crops:**

- **Nutrients** - Scavenge and bring nutrients back into the rooting zone, increase nutrient cycling efficiency, add nitrogen using legumes, increase soil carbon, and manage the C:N ratio to tie up and release nitrogen
- **Soil Building** - Reduce wind and water erosion by providing soil cover, root mass to hold the soil in place, increase in soil structure to strengthen the soil against the elements, and increase in infiltration to reduce runoff
- **Compaction** - Increase in roots, soil structure, and organic matter alleviate compaction by creating pores and channels allowing the movement of nutrients, air, and water and reduces energy used by cash crops to root
- **Soil Structure** - Builds soil structure with additional roots, surface cover, increase in organic matter, and increase in underground wildlife
- **Organic Matter** - Utilize carbon from the air to put in the soil using plants, increase in underground wildlife cycling, and degradation of carbon
- **Water** - Increase infiltration and water holding
- **Soil Organisms** - Make nutrients plant available, increase efficiency of the nutrient cycle, pest control, increase soil organic matter, form partnerships with plants to increase nutrient and water exchange

Cover crops not only provide benefits for soil, water, and air, they may also provide wildlife benefits.

**Wildlife Benefits of Cover Crops:**

- **Habitat** – Provide diversity, nesting cover, brood-reading habitat, escape cover, and shelter
- **Food Source** – Seeds produced, insects that are attracted, and cover crop plants all provide a source of food to a host of species
- **Pollinators** – Certain cover crops are attractive to pollinators, which bring advantages for agriculture and the ecosystem

Producers have observed an increase in wildlife in fields that have cover crops versus fields that do not have cover crops. This ranges from single-celled bacteria to whitetails, with a variety in-between. With minimal scientific literature published on how wildlife are using cover crops and what time of year they are using them, we need more information to know what works best for designing cover crops for multiple benefits.

We are wrapping up a study in southern Minnesota comparing wildlife usage of corn fields with cover crops and corn fields without cover crops. Cameras were placed near wildlife travel corridors around the fields and video footage was taken during harvest to monitor wildlife leaving each field. This study is being completed in partnership with a National Wildlife Federation Cover Crop Champion grant and we will be sharing our findings in the coming months. If you’d like to share your wildlife numbers and/or observations, please contact us!

* Article and photos courtesy of Dusty Van Thuyne, PF FBB II and Jennifer Hahn, PF Precision Ag and Conservation Specialist
Partner Profile - Cory Netland (MN DNR)

Cory Netland has been a part of the MN Department of Natural Resources since 2012. In 2013, he began managing for wildlife in Brown, Chippewa, Kandiyohi, Meeker, Redwood, and Renville counties as the Area Wildlife Supervisor. Recently, he has been awarded with the 2018 Wildlife Professional of the Year Award from Pheasants Forever during the Minnesota State Convention. This award recognized Cory for his extraordinary commitment to the protection of upland wildlife habitat and hunting heritage in MN.

Prior to starting his career with the MN DNR, Cory received a Bachelor’s of Science degree from the University of Minnesota, Duluth. After receiving his degree, Cory worked towards perpetually protecting land through CREP, implementing conservation on private lands through conservation programs such as CRP, and managing the Hawk Creek Watershed Project in effort to improve and protect water quality in the Minnesota River basin.

Cory has been an exceptional and passionate partner to Pheasants Forever. Since starting his career with the MN DNR, over 1,100 acres has been permanently protected in the central region of MN as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in partnership with the MN DNR, Pheasants Forever, and the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Cory has worked endlessly to protect and preserve Minnesota’s natural resources. His passion for habitat protection is one that is greatly treasured within Pheasants Forever.

*Article courtesy of Laura Merten, PF FBB II

Plant Profile - Prairie Blue-Eyed Grass

Despite its name, Prairie Blue-Eyed Grass (Sisyrinchium campestre) is not a grass at all; it is a member of the Iris Family. This plant is perennial and can normally be found growing in dry, sandy, or gravelly soils of the prairie. Bloom period is mid spring to early summer (May-June). The leaves are green and flat, linear in shape, coming to a sharp point at the tip and are usually hairless. The stems are green, slightly waxy and generally extend longer than the leaves.

Plants are normally less than 1’ tall, but can reach heights up to 16”. Flower color varies from shades of blue to white. The flowers measure approximately ½” to ¾” across and are made up of 3 petals and 3 sepals, with yellow stamen protruding from a yellow center.

Several other Sisyrinchium species can be found in Minnesota. This particular species has a fairly vast distribution in the state of Minnesota, having been documented in almost all counties.

*Article by Gemma Kleinschmidt, PF Senior FBB; photos courtesy of Neil Shook
2018 MN PF State Convention Highlights

Volunteer of the Year: Tyler Even

Wildlife Professional of the Year: Cory Netland (MN DNR)

Youth Chapter of the Year: Nobles County PF

Bill Sandy “Making A Difference” Award: Matt Bremer

Partnership of the Year: Bird Bustin’ Babes

Banquet of the Year: Sibley County PF

Chapter of the Year: Martin County PF

Brood Booster Award: Redwood SWCD

Lifetime Achievement Award: Joe Duggan

Above and Beyond Award: Gemma Kleinschmidt (MN PF FBB)

You call this SPRING?

"The earth laughs in flowers.”
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

"It is an incalculable added pleasure to any one's sum of happiness if he or she grows to know, even slightly and imperfectly, how to read and enjoy the wonder-book of nature."
- Theodore Roosevelt

Partnership of the Year: Bird Bustin’ Babes

Banquet of the Year: Sibley County PF

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Brood Booster Award: Redwood SWCD

Lifetime Achievement Award: Joe Duggan

Above and Beyond Award: Gemma Kleinschmidt (MN PF FBB)

To see more highlights from the State Convention, check out the MN Pheasants Forever Facebook Page!

Farm Bill Biologist Quarterly Highlights:
January 1, 2018 - March 31, 2018

| Landowner Contacts (Phone, Email, Mailings, Etc.) | 1,419 Contacts |
| Contracts (CRP, RIM, EQIP, Etc.) | 47 Contracts |
| Impacted Acres (Contracts, Monitoring, Etc.) | 3,215.66 Acres |
“A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity.”

- Aldo Leopold

Contact a PF Biologist Near You:

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Vacant - Brown County

About The Farm Bill Biologist (FBB) Position:

Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologists are staff in who specialize in conservation programs and habitat planning and work with landowners who are interested in voluntary conservation programs.

These positions are made possible due to the support of the following partners and the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (FBAP):

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR), Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Environment Trust Fund and local Pheasants Forever Chapters.