Updates From the Field:

Bobwhite Quail and Conservation Education

Recently, Thurman Tucker, President of the Metro Chapter of Quail Forever, and myself, took several high school students out on a Quail Forever habitat restoration site, just south of Spring Grove. We illustrated the conservation goals of the landowner, along with the wildlife potential of the valley, and we explained what we've accomplished our first year. We showed them four food plots that were established this past summer and identified the varieties of plants that were found in our upland bird seed mixture, such as grain sorghum, pearl millet and sunflowers. We elaborated on the different elements and variables that encompass suitable habitat for bobwhite quail, including ample foraging and sheltering opportunities, dense and diverse cover, a component of annual weeds, shrubs, brambles, and conifer cover. Thurman and I explained the importance of creating well-protected "soft" edges through edge-feathering, so that the coveys of quail can move safely when seeking sites for foraging, dusting, thermal cover, or evading predators. The area is very supportive to an array of wildlife, including healthy numbers of white-tail deer, wild turkey, ring-neck pheasants, and a growing number of bobwhite quail. The landowner is a wildlife enthusiast, an avid hunter, and he is very conservation-minded. He aspires to invest an impressive amount of time, labor, and funds into his land to ensure that his quail numbers continue to grow. He also puts a great emphasis on conservation education and getting our local kids involved with hands-on restoration projects. We hope to have the students come back to his farm this spring to assist with establishing some additional annual food plots and perennial cover to create brood-rearing sites.

* Photos and article courtesy of Eric Ressel, PF FBB
A native Minnesotan, I grew up in Scott County, it was the “country” back then, not so much anymore. It was there that I developed my love for the outdoors; hunting pheasants in the corn fields, duck hunting in the Minnesota River bottoms and trout fishing on Eagle Creek. After graduating from high school, I attended the University of Minnesota – Crookston. A two year school at the time, I figured that if things didn’t pan out, I would have time to redirect. As fate would have it, I was accepted into the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) Student Trainee Program. I enjoyed the work and decided to attended North Dakota State University after graduating from UMC. I worked two summers with SCS while earning a BS in Zoology – Fish and Wildlife Management emphasis from NDSU in 1984.

I’ve been fortunate to have worked throughout the state with SCS/NRCS (and would encourage others to do so if the opportunity presents itself); Big Stone and Pennington/Red Lake/East Polk counties as a student trainee. I came on full time after graduation as a Soil Conservationist in Blue Earth County for two years and from there, District Conservationist in Chisago County (where I still live today). Biologist positions in the late 80’s were quite limited, typically one biologist per state. However, MN had an ongoing watershed/flood prevention program with a dedicated biologist position and I accepted that position in 1988, the state biologist position opened in 1991 and I was fortunate to get the job and have been in that position since.

Time truly flies when you are having fun. It’s not often that people work their entire career (36+ years) with one employer. It can happen if you have a passion for what you are doing, believe that what you are doing makes a difference and you enjoy the people you work with. We surely couldn’t get conservation done without partnerships. The MN PF Biologists are a talented and energetic group. Keep up the hard work - it’s a great partnership!

**Congratulations to Mark on his recent retirement and thank you for your many years of commitment to conservation!**
Blue Earth County PF Chapter recognizes Outstanding Conservationists

Congratulations to the Widman Family as the 2018 Conservationist of the Year award recipients from the Blue Earth County Chapter of Pheasants Forever!

The Widman family has partnered with their local USDA and SWCD offices to implement many wildlife friendly and water quality improvement practices on their family farm northwest of Minnesota Lake in Blue Earth County. Since 2009, the Widman Family has enrolled over 148 acres of marginal cropland into the federal-state partnership program the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) – Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Program. This program has allowed them to permanently protect and restore both native prairie and native wetland habitats via these permanent conservation easements. In addition to their upland/wetland restoration work, the Widman Family has also installed permanent buffer strips along over a mile of open drainage ditch on their farm. These buffer strips will provide excellent filtration for runoff from adjacent cropland while also providing wildlife habitat. Along with their efforts to permanently protect and restore marginal cropland and sensitive areas, the Widman Family has also enrolled land into the temporary Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to the tune of over 39 acres. In total the Widman Family has set aside over 200 acres of marginal or sensitive land to the benefit of everyone’s public water and wildlife resources. The Blue Earth County Chapter of Pheasants Forever extends their congratulations and gratitude to the Widman Family.

Personally, I’ve worked with the Widman family to enroll 50 acres of WRP-RIM and over a mile of RIM buffer. They’ve been great to work with and are passionate about getting things done right. The flood prone nature of the farm and the wishes of Linda Widman’s late husband were the primary drivers in their decision to place over 148 acres into WRP-RIM. While some of the family remains in the area another group now lives in eastern South Dakota. They enjoy stopping in on the family farm to see how the wetland and prairie restorations are coming along, and they enjoy seeing what wildlife are using the site.

*Article and photo courtesy of Jeff Potts, PF FBB
Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) is a native perennial plant that belongs to the Bellflower Family (Campanulaceae).

Not a wide-spread plant in MN, it can be found naturally occurring along the southeastern edge of the state. This plant grows in wet habitat and moist soils, such as floodplains, wet meadows, open woodlands, and along the banks of streams and wetlands.

Bloom period is mid-summer to early fall (July-September) and flowers are bright red in color. The flowers are irregular in shape, with 3 petals on the bottom and 2 petals on the top which join to form a thin tube at the base. Because of its unique flower shape, hummingbirds are one of the only species that can successfully pollinate it.

The leaves are toothed and simple, arranged alternately along a single-stemmed plant. It reaches heights of 2-4 ft tall. Its common name comes from the color of the flowers resembling the robes of Roman Catholic cardinals.

*Article and photo courtesy of Gemma Kleinschmidt, PF Sr FBB*
“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:

Ethan Boertje - Brown County - (507) 341-0050, eboertje@pheasantsforever.org
Kayla Blocker - McLeod County - (515) 320-4007, kblocker@pheasantsforever.org
Jill Fejszes - Marshall, West Polk, Pennington Counties - (218) 280-5978, jfejszes@pheasantsforever.org
Jacob Granfors - Aitkin, Carlton Counties - (218) 434-0929, jgranfors@pheasantsforever.org
Megan Howell - Murray County - (641) 860-0890, mhowell@pheasantsforever.org
Gemma Kleinschmidt - Swift County - (701) 215-8386, gkleinschmidt@pheasantsforever.org
Josh Meissner - Douglas County - (320) 292-6606, jmeissner@pheasantsforever.org
Laura Merten - Kandiyohi County - (507) 438-2913, lmerten@pheasantsforever.org
Jacob Nelson - West Ottertail County - (218) 234-8487, jnelson@pheasantsforever.org
Tony Nelson - Clay County - (218) 791-6714, tnelson@pheasantsforever.org
Josh Pommier - Meeker County - (320) 292-5860, jpommier@pheasantsforever.org
Jeff Potts - Blue Earth County - (507) 508-0615, jpotts@pheasantsforever.org
John Rainey - Lyon County - (507) 696-9064, jrainey@pheasantsforever.org
Sara Reagan - Lac qui Parle County - (507) 829-0778, sreagan@pheasantsforever.org
Eric Ressel - Houston County - (262) 339-7586, eressel@pheasantsforever.org
Nick Smetana - Watonwan County - (608) 797-3375, nsmetana@pheasantsforever.org
Luke Thoma - Todd County - (320) 232-7079, lthoma@pheasantsforever.org
BJ Werk - Precision Ag & Conservation Specialist - (701) 238-6504, bwerk@pheasantsforever.org

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.