



PHEASANT COOPERATIVES

How many of you remember the days waking up to the crowing of a pheasant? Do you miss the sound? If you do, you will be happy to know about the Michigan Pheasant Restoration Initiative (MPRI). This initiative is an opportunity for neighboring landowners to work together toward restoring habitat by building landowner cooperatives!

The initiative is supported by many organizations and government agencies including Michigan Conservation Districts, Pheasants Forever, Michigan United Conservation Clubs, Ducks Unlimited, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Department of Agriculture, Michigan State University Extension, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, etc. The most important member would be the landowners who wish to participate in a co-op. The initiative depends on what the landowners will do. It will help habitat and build community unity.

Over the years landowners have helped on their individual pieces of property by being conservation minded. However, in order for this initiative to become fruitful landowners living near each other must work together adding and enhancing habitat as a whole, not as individual pieces. Co-ops would need to see changes to habitat of approximately 1,200 acres in a 10,000 acre block. Restored and enhanced habitat needs to include nest cover, winter cover, and winter food, and include connectivity from property to property. Grassland and farmland is crucial to pheasant habitat, and any pheasant habitat is also beneficial for song birds, migratory birds, deer and other wildlife species.

You might ask "How do I know where to start and where to focus conservation efforts?" And the answer is, check with your local Conservation District! In Hillsdale, Lenawee and Monroe Counties there is a biologist hired to help form and guide pheasant co-ops. This biologist can help find existing acreage, show where potential acreage might be, where farmland needs to remain while using conservation farming and help with the finding of new members and information sessions. The biologist can also help with seeing if any Farm Bill or partner programs can help in habitat establishment or even enhancement of conservation farming.

There is a new co-op starting to form out near Lake Hudson. The Lake Hudson State Recreation Area is working with multiple local Pheasant Forever Chapters. The chapters are volunteering labor and funds to clear and clean land taken over by invasive species. This work will take several years but will become prime pheasant habitat with native grass plantings with wildflowers and food plots. It is hoped that local landowners will join with Lake Hudson and connect filter strips, buffers and other blocks of habitat to this site; kind of like a hub and spoke idea. There is a lot of interest and people are starting to become involved.

There are several places to get more information. The Department of Natural Resources' website is www.michigan.gov/pheasant; if you are on Facebook "LIKE" the Lake Hudson Pheasant Cooperative page or contact the biologist Lauren Lindemann at the Lenawee Conservation District office at 517-263-7400, ext. 119.