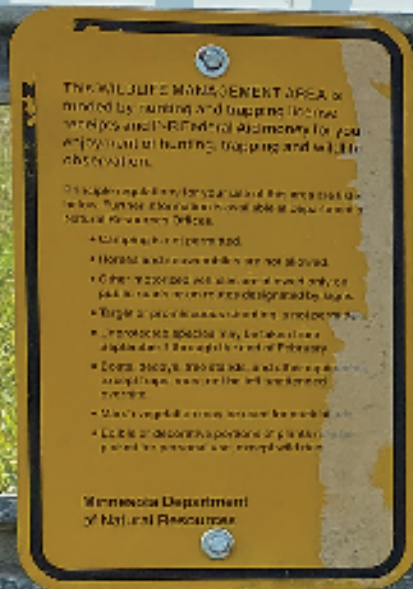


ADOPT A WILDLIFE AREA





In Minnesota, we have the luxury of having many Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) that serve as both habitat for upland wildlife and places to hunt for the hunting public.

Pheasants Forever takes great pride when land is acquired through the organization, helping create more WPAs, WMAs and other permanently public lands. It is one facet of the habitat mission.

But over time, without ongoing maintenance and habitat management, WMAs, WPAs and other public lands can become overgrown, look tired, lose some of their attractiveness to wildlife, and generally need some cleanup and TLC.

That is why the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) created a program for interested organizations to help. The Adopt-a-WMA program was

created in 2011 by the Minnesota legislature and has been a key program for some Minnesota Pheasants Forever chapters to fully subscribe to.

Two of these chapters are in Brown and Nobles Counties. Both chapters have worked closely with Joe Stangel, Assistant Regional Wildlife Manager with the Minnesota DNR out of New Ulm, Minnesota.

“I want to first thank Brown and Nobles Counties for taking very active roles in the Adopt-a-WMA program,” said Stangel. “With their efforts we have been able to augment our staff with their teams of volunteers to improve and drive forward support and needed maintenance of the WMAs in our area.”

Brown and Nobles counties have adopted all the WMAs in their respective counties. In Brown

County there are a total of 34 WMAs totaling 4,639 acres. In Nobles County there are a total of 46 WMAs totaling 6,984 acres.

“We have seen trees invade, weeds take over and just basic wear-and-tear happen on the public lands in Nobles County,” says Scott Rall, chapter president of Nobles County Pheasants Forever. He profiled a rundown of the activities the chapter focuses on to help maintain and improve public lands in the county.

- Spray noxious and invasive weeds — like Canada thistle, wild parsnip and poison hemlock — that don’t provide meaningful value to wildlife.

- Remove invasive trees that deteriorate grassland bird (read, pheasant) nesting success and carrying capacity.



- Remove fencing and barbed wire to help keep hunting dogs safe.

- Replace worn, damaged or missing signs to make sure public lands are clearly marked.

- Remove and clean up trash or garbage that is dumped; it is amazing and sad what some folks will use a wildlife area for.

- Create and improve parking areas with signage and signboards, to make the public feel welcome and help provide for a pleasant public land experience.

- Plant shrubs and trees as new winter cover, always a limiting factor in this northern country.

- Plant and develop food plots for winter feed on wildlife areas.

- Mow burn breaks for the following year’s prescribed fire to be done by DNR fire crews.

- Mow parking lots to help ensure there are no “non-prescribed” catalytic converter fires in the fall.

Here in Brown County, we work with the same list. Additionally, I have been championing a new

descriptive sign suggestion as a possible replacement for the standard wood-routed signs for public areas. Those signs weather fast and tend to be maintenance-intensive.

I believe this drive to standardize the informational overview for each WMA would be driven and could be funded by Pheasants Forever chapters. It is another activity that chapters anywhere could do. Currently many of the WMAs in southwestern Minnesota have no signage, or old signs that are falling apart. A new sign option could be more durable, and the replacement cost is low.

The Adopt-a-WMA program helps maintain good facilities, and improves prairie/grassland habitat and food sources for pheasants and other wildlife. Planting new shrubs provides food as well as winter cover. Removing tall, noxious trees like cottonwoods reduces hawk and owl perches. Creating parking areas provides a safe area where cars are not parked on roads, which increases the risks of vehicular accidents. Parking areas also help protect hunting dogs from roadway accidents.

“Adopt-a-WMA has been a really big program marrying both private and public resources to better work together,” said Stangel. “Brown County and Nobles County PF have worked hand-in-hand on what areas





to focus on each spring. Then it is all about execution.”

“I have been in contact with many other chapters, conservation organizations and individuals now through the efforts of Scott and Tim to help drive more chapters to get involved, and want to thank them,” Stangel added.

And our chapters have gone beyond our member ranks to find bodies willing to help in the efforts.

In Brown County and Nobles County we have enlisted 4H clubs, Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapters, high schools trap teams and other habitat organizations like the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, along with other volunteers. We welcome all to come help and get involved.

The goal is to improve these public lands for wildlife and for the people that use these acres. A side benefit is better hunting.

Other organizations would make great partners too, so if you are thinking your chapter doesn't have the person power to do something like this, consider teaming up with organizations like the ones mentioned. Other ideas include the Boy Scouts, church youth groups, Lions and Kiwanis clubs, and the Rotary club.

The Adopt-a-WMA program started in 2011 but by 2016 there were only 16 WMAs adopted. The program was re-launched in 2019, and now there are well over 200 adopted WMAs in Minnesota. This number will grow as more people who love wildlife, and the habitat

wildlife uses, become aware of the program and then add their time and talents to its efforts.

Chapters, get busy. If you are in another state, take advantage of any similar programs; Michigan's Adopt-a-Game-Area program comes to mind. If you are in a state where no formal program exists, start making some calls to local agency wildlife managers and see what you can do to help. I bet you will get a positive response.

Public lands need you. And what better use for the people power and resources of a Pheasants Forever chapter.



Tim Kraskey is president of the Brown County Pheasants Forever Chapter in Minnesota.