

# Have you got pheasants on your farm?

**By Daryl Fisher**  
*Biologist Dept. of Wildlife and Parks*

There are a few important types of habitats that pheasants need in order to have an abundant population in an area. nesting cover, brood-rearing habitat, and winter cover are probably the most important.

Pheasants are a very short-lived species. If you want to have an abundant population come hunting season, you need a lot of young birds, and that starts with nesting. If you have green wheat on your farm, you may already have a very good nesting cover. Pheasants nesting in a vigorous, healthy stand of wheat usually have good nesting success. Years with poor wheat stands usually result in poor pheasant chick production.

Having some areas in a warm-season grass cover, such as Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields, or better yet, Continuous CRP

(CCRP) borders, grassed terraces, or “wet” areas, can provide needed secure nesting cover during those years of poor wheat stands.

Brood habitat is often the habitat that is in shortest supply. Good brood habitat consists of areas containing lots of broadleaf plants, such as perennial legumes or annual weeds. Broadleaf plants provide habitat for the insects that young pheasants need, and are open enough at ground level that the chicks can easily catch this protein-rich food that the fast-growing chicks absolutely must have.

Areas of annual weeds in odd areas and CRP that have forbs or alfalfa planted or interseeded into it, are good brood habitat, as long as the CRP grass stand is not so dense at ground level that the chicks cannot easily move through the vegetation. Grass plants by themselves simply do not provide nearly as many insects as do forbs or weeds. Alfalfa fields would be very good

brood habitat, but haying operations are often very detrimental to birds that cannot evade the haying equipment.

Winter cover needs to provide dense enough vegetation that it helps protect birds from body-heat robbing cold temperatures, but needs to be near a food source, such as waste grain left after harvest. Good winter cover can be good warm-season grass stands such as CRP, shrub thickets, or heavy weed patches.

The CRP acres in western Kansas have been providing some important pheasant habitats. As whole field CRP contracts expire and are destined to be put back into crop production, how would this affect pheasants on your farm? If there are areas in the CRP fields that are poor soil, highly erosive, or would not fit as well into the farming operation (such as pivot corners), or for some other reason you feel should stay in the existing grass cover, then look seriously at

the CCRP. Pheasants obviously would not be the deciding factor on whether a CCRP contract is signed for these acres, but they may well benefit from keeping some areas in grass.

If CCRP does not fit your operation and you still want to improve habitat for pheasants or any other wildlife, then the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program may be able to help you with cost-share in establishing habitat practices. Both of these programs can help you change the expression from “Got Pheasants?” to “I Got Pheasants!”

For more information about types of habitats that pheasants need, please contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or conservation district office located at your local county USDA Service Center at 210 W. 10th, Goodland. To learn more about NRCS, visit the Kansas NRCS Web site at [www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov).

# A good year for the wetlands program in western Kansas

**By Steven P. Graber**  
*Resource Soil Scientist*

Of all the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) applications received in the state of Kansas during Fiscal Year 2009, nearly half of them came from “arid” western Kansas. That may seem strange to many of you, but there are several reasons that this may have occurred. Western Kansas is home to a unique ecosystem called Playa Lakes that stretches across the High Plains. These are the sometimes annoying small mud holes that cause tillage and crop problems, to the obvious large basins that most all would recognize as occasional or seasonal wetlands.

One factor that may have contributed to the increase in applications is that rainfall has once again started to bless the area, and landowners are remembering why they had trouble farming that certain low area. Another factor is that there have been several individuals that have done a very good job of selling the program to potential participants. Lastly, the Geographic Area Rate Cap, which sets the upper limit of what the government may pay for the easement has been raised to a level that is attractive to the landowner. Combine all of these factors, and there is the potential to have a number of applications

come from an unlikely part of the state.

The WRP is a voluntary restoration program that provides technical assistance to restore and improve wetland resources on private lands. This program is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). If you are interested and think that you may have an area that may qualify for the WRP, all that is necessary is to make application to the program. An application does not obligate the landowner to continue with the WRP. The NRCS will then determine if the area is eligible for the program. The applications are ranked for environmental benefit, and funding decisions are made. An offer is then made to the landowner to purchase a conservation easement on the land, at which time the landowner has the option to accept or reject the offer. A landowner may also withdraw from the WRP at any time prior to accepting the offer without penalty.

If the landowner accepts the offer, NRCS will proceed with the legal work to establish the easement. There are several options in WRP contracts. The landowner may select a 10-year agreement without an easement, an easement of 30 years, or a permanent easement. However,

anything less than a permanent easement is funded at a reduced level and the landowner must pay part of the restoration costs. The landowner maintains title to the land, control of access, use for non-developed recreational activities, and subsurface mineral rights. The

WRP contract requires that any uses of the land be compatible with the conservation objectives of the program.

For more information about NRCS programs, visit the Kansas NRCS Web site at [www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov).



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# Conservation 2010

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## Friends of Agriculture Greg Nemechek and Steve Evert



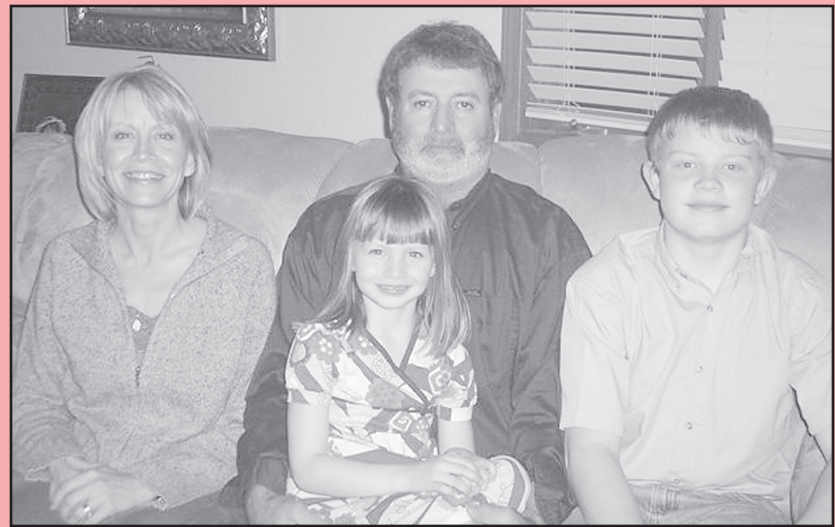
Greg Nemechek



Steve Evert



## Windbreak Award Mr. and Mrs. Robin Deeds



## Bankers Award Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Nemechek

Awards Banquet 6:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 15, Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall

*Editor's note:* The staff of *The Goodland Star-News* hopes you enjoy reading about your great neighbors as much as we have enjoyed writing about them.