

Dept. of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks
1420 E. 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Sirs:

Please put me on mailing list for your FWP News. For your records, I am a writer of articles and books on outdoor subjects.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Arnold Foss
994-3551

file is pheasants

February 24, 1988

Editor, Montana Outdoors
Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East Sixth
Helena, MT 59620

(for publication)

Dear Sir:

If newspaper reports are accurate, there is good news for pheasants in our 1987 legislation -- and some other news that may not be good. The good news is that hunting-license fees are being raised to pay for habitat acquisition. The worrisome news is that there is also a new program for releasing pen-raised pheasants.

Biologists in all pheasant states, I think, concur that the birds respond to habitat changes. Certainly this seems to be the case in Montana.

It is also widely accepted that the release of pen-raised pheasants does not help wild populations. The tame birds seldom survive long enough to breed. Most do not last long enough even to provide hunting -- unless they are stocked shortly before the hunting begins. Again, this is a simplified summary, but I think that most biologists would agree with it.

There may be another problem: pen-raised pheasants may actually damage wild populations. This is not as widely accepted, and I do not know whether it has been proven by biological studies. Rigorous studies would be even more difficult to conduct with pheasants than with trout. The possibility that stocking damages wild populations should not, however, be difficult to take seriously in Montana. Our biologists have showed that stocked trout can indeed harm the fishing rather than help it. The pioneering Montana work is now cited worldwide. With pheasants, the biological relationships might be quite different, and I do not mean to draw an exact parallel.

My experience with this issue comes from Pennsylvania, where I hunted for many years. Southern Pennsylvania used to have excellent wild pheasant populations, and northern Pennsylvania had none. Then stocking programs began. In the north, no harm was done. The birds were planted in small state wildlife areas, where they provided limited hunting -- and good training for dogs -- at a very high cost. The stocked birds did not start viable wild populations.

Hunters in the southern part of the State, however, demanded and got a share of the stocked birds. I used to shoot -- or

rather bag -- a couple of them every year. My dog would sometimes pick them up and bring them to me, with no need for a shot. It wasn't a sporting proposition, but I figured that my family might as well have a meal instead of the foxes. Wild pheasant populations dropped: from excellent in the '40s, '50s, and '60s to fair in the '70s and very poor in '80s. The stocked birds were almost certainly not the main cause of the decline. Habitat shrank, the use of pesticides increased, and hunting pressure increased. All of these problems are familiar in Montana. What was different in Pennsylvania was that pheasants decreased sharply even on posted land with good habitat.

There was, among the experts in Pennsylvania, at least a suspicion that the tame birds were hurting the wild ones: perhaps by direct competition, perhaps by the spreading of disease, perhaps by the attraction of predators, or perhaps by genetic dilution of the hardy wild stock (by the few stocked birds that lived long enough to breed). What was clear was that, despite the stocking or because of it, pheasant hunting which had been very, very good became very, very bad.

If we are to stock pheasants in Montana, let's be careful. We know that it won't help; we have some reason to fear actual damage; and we know that money spent on on habitat improvement produces results.

One option (if there is enough demand) is to develop private, pay-as-you-go hunting preserves, where hunters can at least train dogs over an extended season -- and pay the price of stocking, at no cost to other license-holders. Stocking works under these conditions because the birds are usually released just before they are hunted. This approach is now followed in nearby Idaho and many other states. Farmers earn a little income from such preserves, and there are Montana farmers who could use income.

If there must be stocking at public expense, I hope that it can be confined to a few specific areas where there will be little conflict with wild populations.

Sincerely yours,



Montana Historical Society

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February 12, 1991

Datus C. Proper
1085 Hamilton Road
Belgrade, MT 59714

Dear Datus,

Thank you for sending me your "Biographic Summary" which I have added to your Author File. Both Dave Walter, Reference Librarian, and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it.

Thank's again,

Carol Frasier
Library Tech

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