
FUTURE UPLAND GAMEBIRD EXTENSION PROGRAMS IN MONTANA: ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF COUNTY AGENTS

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In cooperation with Pheasants Forever and Montana State University, I surveyed all 48 county extension agents in Montana who have roles in addressing wildlife and natural resource issues. Twenty-five replies were received, which was a response rate of 52%. Agents expressed considerable interest by landowners and producers in various aspects of upland gamebird management. Sixty-eight percent of agents perceived that the current interest in gamebirds by ranchers, agricultural producers, and other landowners is either medium or high, and that interest will remain stable through 2021. Information on food plots was expressed as being the greatest need, with recommendations for plantings to improve game bird habitat being foremost. Nearly all agents (88%) indicated that producers have considerable interest in cover crops in small grain, including the implications for upland gamebirds. Based on responses received, I recommend that demonstration days and field tours will be the most useful tools to incorporate in future extension program development. Agents also expressed a need for making wildlife expertise available via email. Seventy-nine percent of agents placed substantial priority on in-service training for themselves in gamebird ecology and management, so this is also a valuable future program. I believe that county extension agents can have a significant effect on providing guidance to the future of upland gamebird management by agricultural producers. In so doing, gamebird habitat and numbers might be positively affected across a large portion of Montana.