

## **“GREEN SHEET”**

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**Meeting:** June 5-6, 2009  
**Agenda Item 14:** Pheasant Release Program Update – Briefing  
**Prepared By:** Mick Cope  
**Presented By:** Mick Cope, Upland Game Section Manager, Wildlife Program

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### **Background:**

Pheasants have been released in Washington for over 120 years, beginning in 1883. Early releases resulted in naturally occurring pheasant populations in eastern Washington, however, western Washington weather and lack of preferred habitat prevented establishment of significant naturally reproducing populations. The Department operated 8 game farms in the 1940's into the 1980's, where pheasants were raised for release in both eastern and western Washington. Through changes in philosophy and budget, most of these game farms were closed. The Department currently operates one game farm – the Bob Oke Game Farm in Centralia.

The Bob Oke Game Farm produces approximately 40,000 pheasants per year for release on approximately 25 sites in western Washington. Participation in the western Washington pheasant hunting program has increased every year over the past 10 years, with over 7,500 hunters participating in the program in 2008. An additional 20,000 pheasants are released in eastern Washington, although the birds are raised by contractors (currently the Department of Corrections) rather than by the Department.

At the time this was written, Substitute House Bill 1778, passed by the 2009 legislature and forwarded to the governor for signature, contained two sections that affected pheasant release in Washington. While agency discussions continue, the intent of a western Washington pheasant section was to utilize funding created by a stand-alone western Washington pheasant permit to make the western Washington pheasant program self-sustaining into the future. Another section of the bill modified the Eastern Washington Pheasant Enhancement Program (RCW 77.12.820) by removing the requirement to spend at least 80% of the fund on releasing pheasants in eastern Washington. The law still requires the Department to release pheasants in eastern Washington, but allows more funding to be spent on pheasant habitat enhancement. Habitat enhancement projects will be implemented on private and public lands, with an emphasis on improving habitat on private lands through cooperative agreements such as those described in the Partnerships for Pheasants program. These voluntary agreements increase pheasant habitat quantity and quality while diversifying landowner income through monetary incentives.

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### **Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:**

Pheasant release for hunting in eastern and western Washington in 2009 and in the future.

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### **Public involvement process used and what you learned:**

The western Washington program is supported by a group of volunteers who help transport and release pheasants. The eastern Washington program also utilizes volunteers to release birds, but to a much lesser degree. During the recent budget reductions, both volunteers and other hunters who use the programs have contacted the Department and their legislators expressing their support of the Department's pheasant programs. Pheasants Forever staff and members have also been outspoken and effective supporters of the Department's pheasant management programs and have been instrumental in the passage of pheasant management related legislation.

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**Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):**

None, briefing only. This is a Commission request from the March 6-7, 2009 Commission meeting.

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**Draft motion language:**

N/A

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**Justification for Commission action:**

N/A

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**Communications plan:**

N/A

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