

IDNR announces 2019 state Pheasant Fund Project Grants

January 29 2019 10:53 AM

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) today announced the approval of \$241,533 in grants for two wildlife pheasant habitat projects through the Illinois State Pheasant Fund Special Wildlife Funds Grant Program.

The program provides for enhancing game and non-game wildlife habitat through projects developed by not-for-profit organizations and governmental entities. Funding for the Illinois State Pheasant Fund Special Wildlife Funds Grant Program comes from the sale of Habitat Stamps to sportsmen and sportswomen.

The Illinois State Pheasant Fund Advisory Committee last fall approved \$241,533 in funding for the two grant projects below.

Quail and Upland Game Alliance – A project where applicant landowners participating in USDA’s Conservation Program (CRP) and Non-CRP will receive Illinois Wildlife Bonus Program payments for completing wildlife friendly habitat practices such as native grass and forb plantings, strip disking, invasive species control, legume and forb inter-seeding, strip seeding and prescribed burns.

The bonus payments are made per acre enrolled:

- Native grass and forb plantings on regular CRP areas - \$30/per acre with a maximum of 50 acres per year.
- Strip disking (CRP and Non-CRP) - \$15.00/CRP and \$30.00 /Non-CRP with a maximum of 50 acres per year per landowner.
- Invasive species control (sericea, fescue, honey suckle etc.) \$50.00 per acre with a maximum \$2500 or 50 acres per year per landowner.
- Legume and forb inter-seeding (CRP and Non-CRP) - \$20.00 per acre/CRP and \$60.00 per acre Non-CRP with a maximum of 50 acres per year.
- Strip Spraying (CRP and Non-CRP) - \$12.00 per acre/CRP and \$30.00 per acre Non-

CRP with a maximum of 50 acres per year.

- Prescribed Burn (CRP and Non-CRP) - \$5.00 per acre CRP and \$30.00 per acre with non-CRP payment with a maximum 50 acres per year.

Landowners wishing to apply for the BONUS Incentive Program should contact the Quail and Upland Game Alliance at 812-536-2272 or email bobwhite@psci.net. The website is www.quga.org for more information. \$121,220 in State Pheasant Funds were awarded with the grantee providing \$40,800 in matching funds.

Pheasants and Quail Forever – A project to fund a Farm Bill Biologist position that provides 3,000 acres of Conservation Technical Assistance (Conservation Plans, Prescribed Burn Plans, Mid Contract Management, Monitoring / Status Reviews, Habitat Project Proposals) in the focus and surrounding counties of Winnebago, Boone, Ogle, Lee, and Stephenson counties.

The Farm Bill Biologist (FBB) Program provides conservation technical assistance for the restoration of new and improvement of existing habitat throughout the state of Illinois. They work in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, IDNR, Farm Service Agency, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Illinois Department of Transportation, The Nature Conservancy, other NGOs, and private landowners, among others, to create a landscape scale effect for habitat across Illinois. This benefits upland and grassland species, pollinators, and wetland species. Their primary focus is on private lands; however, they work in partnership with IDNR on state public areas, other entities on county owned lands, and help to focus improvement of lands directly adjacent to public areas.

This northern Illinois Farm Bill Biologist position will be based in the Rockford NRCS Field Office and work in the surrounding counties to promote grassland habitat, conservation agriculture, prescribed fire, and partnership work, particularly with the Middle Rock River Conservation Partnership, The Nature Conservancy, and local Pheasants Forever chapters. This individual will work to establish themselves as the prescribed fire expert in the area and the development of a prescribed fire co-op in the area.

It is estimated that the new Farm Bill Biologist will make at least 600 landowner contacts, conduct at least two landowner workshops, conduct at least two prescribed burn workshops, conduct at least four habitat tours/field days, and assist landowners with at least 30 prescribed burn plans written for the improvement of native habitats, and establish a network of prescribed fire cooperators in the area.

The new Farm Bill Biologist will work to promote and deliver conservation through a wide variety of programs, though primarily use federal Farm Bill programs and available state programs. They expect to organize informational workshops and tours for area landowners that may focus on 1) building better bird habitat, 2) mid-contract management, 3) pollinators, 4) how to maximize your CRP EBI score, 5) prescribed burning, 6) conservation farming, etc. The Farm Bill Biologist will work diligently to promote the best habitat mixes and management strategies to ensure the best habitat is available for pheasants and other grassland wildlife, and work closely with the TNC manager at Nachusa Grasslands, the District Wildlife Biologist, and IDNR Natural Heritage Staff to help manage public lands, where applicable, and private lands adjacent to IL Wildlife Management Areas.

Together, these partners will help promote the use of prescribed fire across the area and provide landscape scale benefits to grasslands and better grassland management in the region. The Farm Bill Biologist will work with local Pheasants Forever chapters on wildlife habitat projects in their areas, as well as any other interested local partners such as the Middle Rock River Conservation Partnership. \$120,313 in State Pheasant Funds were awarded with the grantee providing \$30,000 in matching funds from The Nature Conservancy (\$2,000 in-kind services), and Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever Chapters (\$28,000).