

Checks and Balances

Study Units

Wildlife Management; People and Wildlife

Supplemental Information

The ring-necked pheasant was brought from Asia and introduced to Iowa in the 1900s. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) began stocking pheasants around 1910 with most regions in the state receiving large stockings by 1930. It adapted readily to Iowa's habitats. Populations peaked in the 1940s with estimates as high as 500 pheasants per square mile.

Intensive row crops replaced smaller farms (with a mixture of hay land, pasture, small grain fields, idle grassland, and wetlands). Pheasant numbers declined to an average of fewer than 15 birds per square mile. Pheasants still are Iowa's most important game bird with an estimated statewide population of four to six million birds.

Many factors can influence ring-necked pheasant numbers, but populations primarily are limited by weather conditions and the amount and quality of nesting habitat and winter cover. The Iowa DNR, county conservation boards, private organizations, and private landowners have worked toward increasing habitat for ring-necked pheasants.

Areas of grasses from the previous year are used for nesting as pheasants begin nesting as early as March in southern Iowa. Birds that nest in areas greater than 40 acres have better nest success than those that use smaller stands of cover. Mixed stands of grasses and forbs (flowering plants) are ideal nesting cover for ring-necked pheasants. These areas are not so dense that chicks can't move and provide a plentiful supply of protein rich insects. Insects help pheasant chicks grow rapidly and develop. Chicks are precocial (able to move about freely when hatched) and able to make short flights at ten days of age!

Too much snow and frigid temperatures can be deadly if good winter cover close to food is not available. Shelter belts (rows of conifer / evergreen trees and shrubs) and wetlands with dense stands of cattails provide needed winter cover.

Land managers often try to provide a dependable winter food source. They plant food plots of corn or sorghum adjacent to winter roosting areas. Leaving rows of crops, like corn, can provide life-saving food for pheasants and other wildlife during harsh winters.

See the Iowa DNR website [upland game page](#) for specific techniques used by wildlife biologists to monitor ring-necked pheasant populations.

Teaching Suggestions

Use the [Wildlife Management](#) information and references listed in the **Additional Materials** section to research specific factors affecting pheasant (a more common animal in Iowa than moose) survival. Students can work together to fill in the "Students need to specify what" blanks to create the thirty-six



cards needed to play the simulation game. See the listing of cards needed and copy pages in the *Project WILD* guide. Follow the procedure in the activity to play the game.

"The agency where you work has just received a donation of 180 acres of land. The site includes approximately 150 acres of cropland, an abandoned farmstead, and approximately 25 acres of grazed timber that borders a small creek, which forms the west property line. The land slopes downward from north to south. The southeast corner of land remains wet through most of the farming season. Your agency wishes to manage this area for wildlife and is particularly interested in improving habitat for ring-necked pheasants. Your agency wants you to develop a management plan to increase food, water, and shelter for pheasants. As a wildlife manager, list the management techniques you would use and explain how these techniques would benefit pheasants and wildlife in general."

Have students' research pheasants and design a habitat plan for the area. Use the [Area Map](#) and the [Ring-necked Pheasant Habitat Plan](#).

Evaluation

See the activity.

Student Materials

- Area Map
- Ring-necked Pheasant Habitat Plan

Teacher Aids

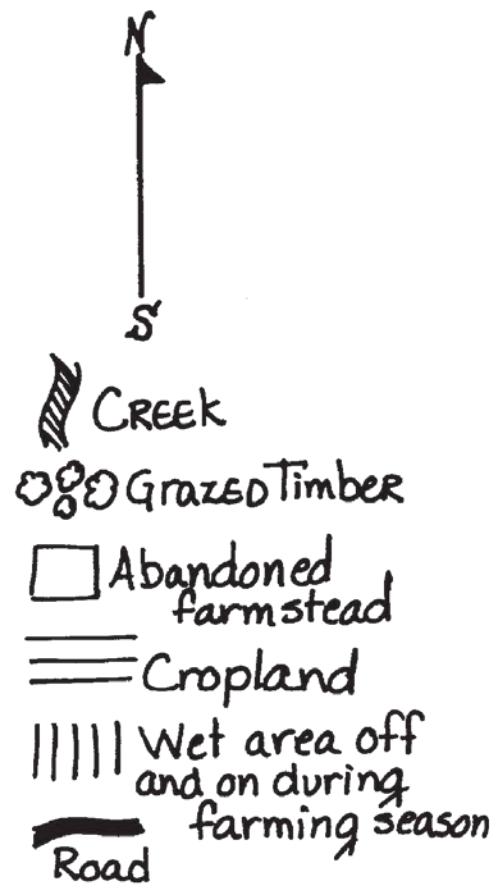
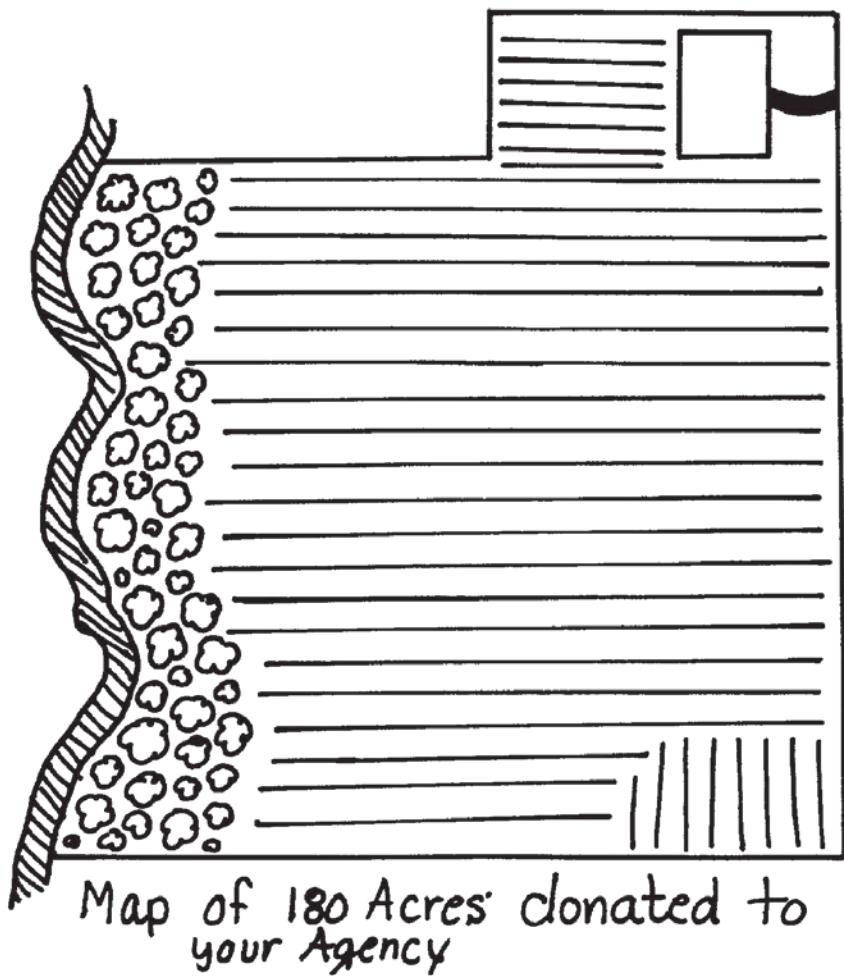
None

Additional Materials

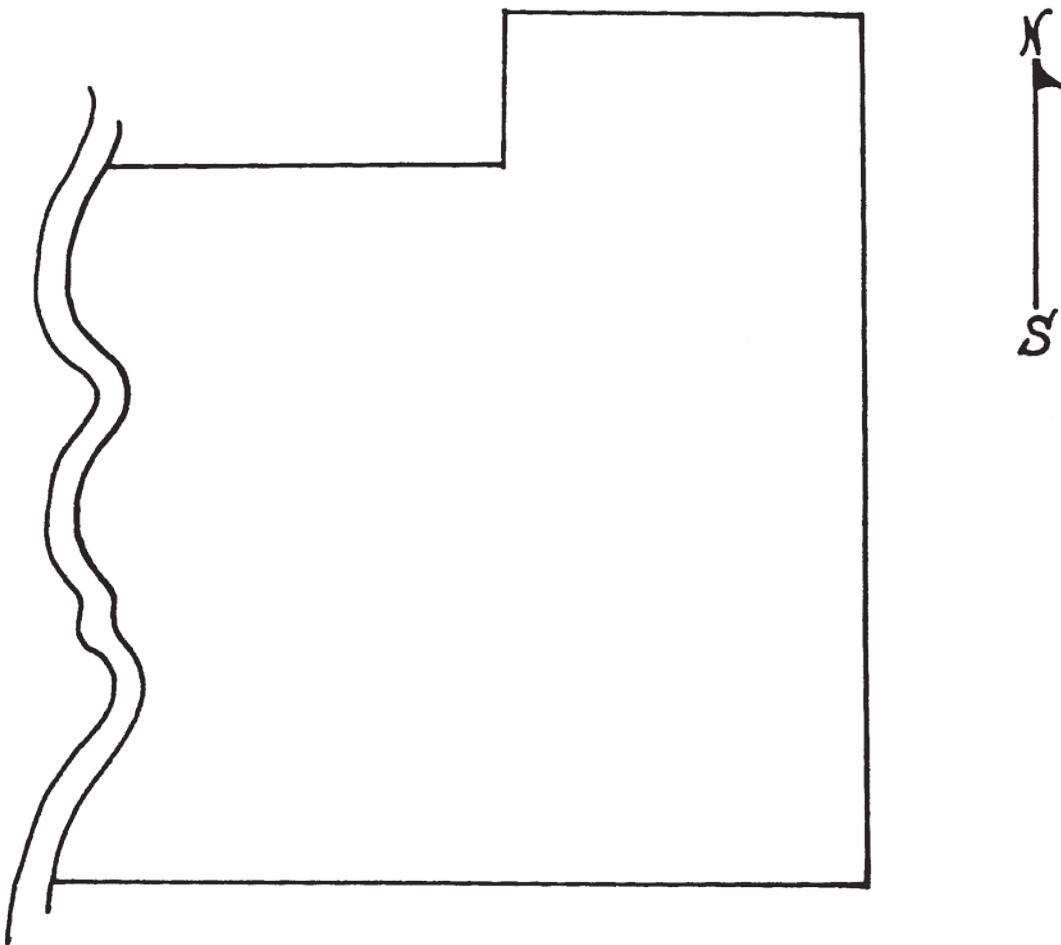
- [Pheasants Forever](#)- Youth Upland Habitat Projects
- Farris, A.L. et al. 1977. [The Ring-necked Pheasant in Iowa](#). Des Moines: Iowa Conservation Commission. (13.2 MB PDF)
- [Cool things you should know about pheasants](#), Iowa Department of Natural Resources News Release 10/9/2015
- [History of the ring-necked pheasant](#), Iowa Department of Natural Resources (166 KB PDF)
- Henderson, C.L. 1987. *Landscaping For Wildlife*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. This book can be purchased from online retailers, but check with your local county conservation board to see if they have a copy available for loan.
- USDA and Iowa DNR. 2001. [Attracting Wildlife on Private Lands](#). Available from the NRCS website as a 642 KB PowerPoint.



Area map (180 acres donated to your agency)



Ring-necked Pheasant Habitat Plan



List and describe the management techniques you would use to improve this habitat for ring-necked pheasants as well as other wildlife species. Indicate on the map, the location(s) of the different management practices.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

