What’s in a mission statement? Most organizations are built around one, but what is the significance? A clear mission statement is the cornerstone of any organization that defines its purpose and function. Most important is that anyone with an interest in the organization must be able to clearly understand the mission.

Without strong supporting members, an organization cannot meet its mission. We all have goals and interests of our own that we are more likely to relate to and strive to achieve through a common mission. That’s what brings members together through Blue Mountain Pheasants Forever. Whether its habitat enhancement or introducing youth to shooting, upland bird hunting, and habitat education, we share in meeting the Pheasants Forever mission through OUR successful chapter. The Pheasants Forever mission reads as follows.

Pheasants Forever is dedicated to the conservation of pheasants, quail and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public awareness, education, and land management policies and programs.

When you break this statement down, the #1 goal is conservation, plain and simple. While originally founded to support pheasant and upland bird populations and hunting, the conservation work we do benefits all local wildlife.

How do we achieve a conservation goal? The four actions identified in the mission statement are preceisely how its done. 1) Habitat enhancement; 2) public awareness; 3) education; and 4) land management policies and programs. At the chapter level, we work diligently on the first three, and when an appropriate opportunity arrises, we pursue the fourth. At the national level, there are folks like you and I that are dedicated to developing policies and influencing programs like the Conservation Reserve Program to ensure wildlife habitat is appropriately represented.

As you can see, there is a place for every one of us to contribute to the chapter and the mission. Our chapter includes a Youth Committee, Habitat Committee, Banquet Committee, Public Relations and Recruiting, and a Board of Directors that steers the chapter. Anyone interested in conservation can find a place to make a difference with Pheasants Forever. On behalf of the chapter Executive Committee, let me thank you for your support and dedication to Blue Mountain Pheasants Forever. Your involvement is critical to OUR success!
I am a fish and wildlife biologist. I get my kicks (and earn a living) assessing environmental impacts on, and managing and restoring fish and wildlife habitat. I track tightly within my lane of technical, scientific expertise and typically leave the politics to folks with a desire to argue and decipher that sort of thing. However, the Trump administration has introduced a bill to the House of Representatives that the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP) brought to my attention. The Public Land Renewable Energy Development Act (HR 825) is a bill that establishes two main authorities; 1) continued authorization of the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970; and 2) the authority of the subject act.

HR 825 sounds dangerous, because it is. While “renewable energy” typically includes sources such as timber, hydro, solar, wind, and geothermal power, developing energy-harnessing opportunities on public resources has potential impacts to public use, and potentially fish and wildlife. However, I must point out that Section 4 of HR 825 includes a clause stating that potential development areas identified by the Secretary of the Interior must be coordinated with appropriate State, Tribal, and local governments to “…avoid or minimize conflict with habitat for animals and plants, recreation, and other uses…”

I don’t intend to hang up on possible impacts here, but I want to draw attention the benefits of the bill. Section 7 of HR 825 (Disposition of Revenues) is aimed directly at habitat conservation. A Treasury fund for this Act will be established to deposit any fees or revenues from energy production that may be used for “restoring and protecting...fish and wildlife habitat for affected species; fish and wildlife corridors for affected species; and water resources in areas affected…” (Section 7(c)(2)(a)). My interpretation: In other words, revenue from energy production is authorized to be used for impact mitigation.

Section 7(c)(3) states that “[T]he Secretary [of the Interior] may enter into cooperative agreements (a flexible, federal government work agreement) with State and Tribal agencies, nonprofit organizations, and other appropriate entities to carry out the activities described in [Section 7(c)(2)].”

So, what does this all mean? Well, as you can glean from my synopsis, HR 825 is a renewable energy development bill that makes my hackles prickle. Every bill aiming to develop public lands has the potential to harm precious public natural resources, either directly or indirectly. The federal government is mandated to follow the National Environmental Policy Act to identify impacts and evaluate alternatives for all federal actions, including developing energy sources or issuing permits for such activities, but impacts generally occur to some degree.

On the flip-side, the bill proactively authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to use allocated revenue to mitigate any impacts efficiently and effectively through cooperation with States, Tribes, and nonprofit organization. As far as public land energy development goes, this is a good deal. The TRCP blog post by Julia Peebles couches HR 825 as a “rare win-win scenario for fish and wildlife” and I trust her more politically savvy perspective. You can find that blog post at http://www.trcp.org/2017/08/03/congress-wants-boost-renewable-energy-development-give-conservation-cut-proceeds/.

If you have not already, I encourage you to venture over to the TRCP and read their blogs to see what the organization is about. It’s a great resource for keeping tabs on Capitol Hill and our precious public resources.
Announcements

- BMPF is preparing for the spring banquet. Banquet Chair, Tami Wass, is putting together a steering committee and could use your help. Email tamidwass@gmail.com if interested.
- The September Youth Hunt weekend was incredible! Thanks to everyone who attended. Your attention to firearms safety and ethics resulted in a phenomenal hunting experience, not to mention the wildness of the released pheasant!
- Roadside Litter Patrol – BMPF will be patrolling at Mile 328 on Hwy 12, near Frenchtown. Dates and times to follow.

Committee Updates

Habitat Committee

- The habitat committee is planning to install Christmas tree brush piles again this coming winter. Email the habitat committee chair, Larry Boe, at boeleca@charter.net for more information.
- At the August chapter meeting, it was unanimously approved to purchase approximately 500 plants for general planting among BMPF habitat enhancement sites this coming fall and winter.
  - Elderberry and possibly oakleaf sumac will be planted at the Pataha, Stovall and Sandpit sites.
- Buckley site: The north 40 acres have been mowed.
  - The seed mix is available through NW Grain Growers, just needs to be ordered.
  - The south field is greening up, the north field is not.
  - Burn permit is good through the end of January to torch old weeds.

Board of Directors

- Review of the Chapter’s committees: The consensus was that the Habitat, Youth and Banquet committees are doing a great job.
- The Board recommends to the Chapter that the Youth Committee should consider recruiting student(s) as PF Ringneck members from each school in concert with each Youth Habitat Project.
- Board recommends that the Chapter renew efforts on member recruitment by accepting a volunteer to head up this task.
- Board recommends a Website Manager be selected at the Chapter’s earliest convenience.
- The Board discussed Chapter habitat project outreach and methods of improving or enhancing our efforts. The Chapter shall encourage members to be involved with Natural Resource Groups (such as The Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service, WDFW, USFWS and County Soil and Water Conservation Service). BMPF member(s) shall provide to the chapter any “Agency” meeting or networking opportunity at our BMPF monthly meeting.

Treasurer’s Report

- Account balance as of July 1, 2017 was $63,835.
- Amount spent: $7,360
- Remaining balance: $56,478 as of September 28, 2017
- The annual golf tournament netted $570

Pheasant Facts

Did you know?
A rooster can run up to 10 miles per hour, and fly up to about 50 miles per hour!
Habitat Corner

INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT: WHERE TO BEGIN?

Brad Trumbo

Have you ever been faced with a task that was seemingly insurmountable? Maybe felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility for something entirely impossible to control? This is precisely how many public land managers feel every day as they struggle to maintain and restore quality fish and wildlife habitat among a world of progressively formidable invasive plant species.

Invasive plants that we (everyone) commonly refer to as “weeds” can be a mammoth problem because of their adaptability and competitive advantage over native plant species. While weeds are present and troublesome across the world, in the US, the western states struggle particularly due to dry climate. Weeds have adapted to dryland famously and express astronomical seed production, germination success, early germination before native plants, and furious growth rates in some instances.

Healthy grasslands are a prime example of an ecosystem highly susceptible to noxious weeds. Where healthy native grass stands occur, weeds may commonly be found interspersed, but in relatively manageable numbers. However, if a major disturbance occurs that destroys or inhibits those native grasses from quick regrowth, the seedbank from noxious weed species can be activated and flourish immediately, forming dense monocultures in one season.

To some, this may sound like the plot from a horror movie. The problems that noxious weeds impose on quality habitat are all too real. For readers that are members of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the July-August, 2017, edition of Bugle Magazine presents a two-article special on noxious weeds that puts the potential impacts and the struggle for control into clear perspective.

Control methods such as pulling and spot spraying can be effective in quality habitats, but where to begin tackling major weed infestations can be mentally crippling. Nothing is more humiliating and defeating to a public land manager than failing to keep ahead of the weeds. On more than one occasion I have felt as though I failed the wildlife, taxpayer, and fellow sportsmen and women upon finding a noxious weed hell of Canada thistle, Russian thistle, and kochia on public land under my supervision. Recovering from the initial shock, I try to keep cool, consider the options, and make a game plan. The best place to start? Somewhere! More specifically, here are a few tips and considerations to get you moving.

HERBICIDE APPLICATIONS

Herbicides are quick, and generally effective, but application methods can be costly depending on habitat type, the presence of sensitive desirable species, and the acreage needing treatment. Keeping noxious weeds from flowering is key, but I find that broadleaf herbicides like Amine 2-4-D are most effective when it’s hot and dry (July – August). Unfortunately, by this time of the year, a lot of weeds are already flowering. Even if flowers are immature and have not been pollinated, seeds may be viable. Hitting weeds in the early, rosette stage (March – May) can help get ahead of the game.
I recommend learning about the plants you are treating before diving into a treatment. Timing can be critical, and for plants like Canada thistle that reproduce through roots, not just via seed, a fall application before green thistle dies back for winter can give you an advantage in the coming spring.

LIVESTOCK CONTROL

Goats have proven a useful tool in mowing through vegetation. Anyone unfortunate enough to have goats trespass onto their property can attest to their voracious appetite. Goats can clear vegetation to the ground in little time allowing for effective herbicide treatments behind grazing. Furthermore, appropriately timed grazing may knock back noxious weeds long enough to allow desirable species time to germinate and stand a chance of competing, and possibly thriving.

Some commercial outfits rent goat herds specifically for weed control. I am unsure of what a common rate may be for this service, but it is certainly something to consider if you would rather avoid applying herbicides, but maintain a chance at success. Prepare for several seasons of grazing.

MOWING

Keeping vegetation mowed back is a good option for weed control, but have you ever mowed a plant like yellow starthistle? If so, you know darn well that it takes to a pruning by flowering aggressively. The next thing you know, its three inches tall in full bloom. Mowing is best used in combination with herbicides. Herbicide applications are more efficient and effective when the vegetation is low and plants have less mass to treat. A couple seasons of mowing and herbicide application can be quite effective, but you have to be willing to give up usable wildlife habitat during treatment to be successful.

DISCING AND HARROWING

Discing and harrowing can be used to keep noxious weeds from establishing. Regular cultivation activates the seed bank, allows plants to grow, then uproots them before they flower. Like mowing, this method requires habitat to be essentially lost during treatment, but discing can significantly tax the seed bank, allowing for reseeding with native, desired grasses and forbs.

One disadvantage is the potential for erosion. If rain or snow melt could cause runoff problems and scour the habitat area, particularly if runoff could enter a stream, you may want to select another method.

That sums up some common, effective approaches to noxious weed control, which fit cooperatively with the grassland management techniques discussed in the previous newsletter edition. The severity of an infestation can help determine the best course of action, but I like to approach it as though I were considering surgery to correct a medical crisis. When possible, go with the topical treatments before digging in to remove an organ.

If you want to get serious about habitat improvement, accept up front that the weed control battle requires commitment. There will be no instant gratification (except maybe from herbicide-shriveled weeds), so settle in for a long-term game. I recommend making fast friends with folks who either have the farm equipment you need, or those willing to volunteer their time pulling weeds. And, as always, feel free to consult your friends on the BMPF habitat committee for advice and assistance.
Bird Dogs and Shotguns
August 13th, 2017

Folks arrived Sunday afternoon at the Waitsburg Gun Club to the sound of Brittany Spaniels baying in anticipation. Cayuse Calamity Cate (Cate) and Cayuse Young Chief (Chief) were onsite, staked out among a variety of bird dog training gear including kick traps, e-collars, and homing pigeons.

Chet Hadley and Corrie Thorne Hadley, chapter members and owners of Cate and Chief, are gifted bird dog trainers and handlers; their dogs boasting field trial champion titles as proof. Chet gave a demonstration of the equipment, discussing appropriate uses of e-collars and other tools, while Corrie and Cate demonstrated the use of kick traps.

Upon planting a couple pigeons, Corrie released Cate. The demonstration was intended to introduce trap shoot participants to a field trial “gallery”. Cate exemplified a solidly held point as Corrie released a pigeon, fired her cap gun, and released Cate to find the next pigeon.

After Corrie and Cate’s field trial gallery demonstration, they transitioned to work on retrieving. Cate was not as enthusiastic about returning with a training dummy as she was finding live pigeons. Chet’s sage advice? “Don’t ever brag on your dog!”

As the training demo wound down, folks made their way to the shooting area to prepare for the main event, although Chet and Corrie seemed to draw quite a crowd. This was our most well attended among the regular trap shoot events with ten shooters, several of which had not attended previously.

Similar to the past two trap shoots, skill levels varied among the shooters. Some of the older, teenage shooters displayed savvy, dusting about seventy percent of their targets, while others were trying their hands, possibly for the first time.

Folks shot well into the evening, enjoying the challenge. As we wrapped up the BMPF youth trap shoot season, it felt like a great success for all. BMPF thanks all who participated this season, and we hope to see you again next year!
Science for the Birds
GRASSLAND FIRE REGIMES: BURN BABY, BURN

Brad Trumbo

In our Summer 2017 newsletter, I discussed fire as the most effective grassland management tool, which was supported by several scientific publications. I decided to expound upon the benefits of fire by taking a look at historic fire regimes as evidence of natural grassland management.

Consulting scientific literature in a cursory search turned up several articles, each of which suggested the same findings; 1) fire-suppressed grasslands evolve into shrub or woodland dominated cover types; 2) Natural grassland fire regimes relied on periodic drought to create suitable burn conditions; and 3) Fire promotes herbaceous vegetation structure and quality.

Historically, grassland fires occurred over a number of time intervals, the longest being 20 years as discovered by burn scars on pines in Idaho. The majority of other studies found grassland fires to occur at intervals of 10 years or less.

If you recall the previous grassland management article, I mentioned a study that recommended burning at 2 to 3-year intervals, following up with appropriate herbicide treatments to ensure a thriving native grass stand with desirable forbs. This will ensure the most nutritious grasses for browsing wildlife, as well as insect forage and cover for upland birds.

I suppose when asked of the best grassland management technique, the proper response is burn baby, burn!

Native Forbs

Biologists speak endlessly about the importance of native grasses and forbs being critical for brood rearing, but there are few resources that clearly define what a forb actually is, much less what native forbs are desirable. Well, how about we clear up the mystery.

Forbs are defined as herbaceous plants, not being grasses or woody species, typically broadleaf, flowering plants. That’s a fairly broad description which leads one to think of weeds. Well, weeds are forbs and are essential for upland bird survival. Below are a couple common to southeast Washington.

- A 1,000-acre wildfire in Columbia County was a blessing in disguise for rank CRP grassland

- Tumble Mustard (Sisymbrium altissimum)

- Menzies Fiddleneck (Amsinckia menziesii)

More information on forbs to come, but in the meantime, check out the Washington Native Plant Society at http://www.wnps.org/plant_lists/exploring_native_plants.html
2017 Youth Hunt

KIDS, PHEASANT, BIRD DOGS, and WING-SHOOTING

Wiley roosters and pointing dogs set the stage for yet another fantastic BMPF youth hunt weekend, held Saturday and Sunday mornings, September 23rd and 24th. Pre-hunt safety and informational briefings were held as BMPF members scrambled to plant roosters. Thanks to The US Army Corps of Engineers for access to Bennington Lake, and Todd Kimball for access to his private farmland, BMPF was afforded prime lands for the weekend hunt.

Each morning, a convoy of rigs arrived on the scene, spilling a sea of enthusiastic hunter orange.

Forty pheasant were generously donated by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) with the coordination of BMPF member Corrie Thorne Hadley for Saturday’s hunt at Bennington Lake, while BMPF provided 50 roosters for Sunday’s hunt.

Impressive roosters, indeed. Perceptions of planted birds can generally be summed up by “tame, easy, and stupid”; however, roosters provided for the youth hunt fit anything but a hatchery bird stereotype. Once planted, birds began to run into and out of cover. Some birds flushed immediately, sailing across the landscape, only to be seen again on neighboring properties. For the birds that held tight, they rocketed out of the grasses in random directions leaving hunters to forgo a shot in many cases.

Although hunters were split into groups based on age and experience, skilled wing-shooting was evident across the parties. Quick draws and accurate sighting resulted in random selection of who took possession of a harvested bird on more than one occasion.

Among some of the best shots witnessed, a member of the advanced group on Sunday’s hunt pulled off a 40-yard crossing shot with a 20-gauge on a rooster sailing at high speed in retreat from distant hunters.

Check us out on Facebook for event announcements and highlights!
While firearms safety, shooting skills, dog handling, and immersing youth in the splendor of upland bird hunting were among the goals of the youth hunt, the deeper benefit of comradery was afforded all who participated.

At the end of the day, friends, family, canine companions, and time in the great outdoors is what the hunt is all about. Of course, a tailgate cloaked with roosters ain’t to shabby either!

Dan Eveland’s Gordon setter, Molly, got it done at Bennington Lake

The BMPF newsletter features member and volunteer photos pertaining to hunting, dog training, habitat enhancement, etc. We select three to four high quality photos for each edition. To be featured in the BMPF quarterly newsletter, send your photos via email to bmpf258newsletter@gmail.com.
Upland Bird Forecast

SOUTHEAST WASHINGTON

While some popular upland bird hunting sources provide a plethora of information for the 2017 upland bird forecast, their predictions conspicuously refrain from mentioning Washington State. These sources identify that it has been yet another exceptional brood year for California quail and pheasant across many northern-latitude states, but they fail to rightfully include Washington, which also experienced a strong brood year.

Although upland bird populations are not directly monitored, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WFDW) biologists use a metric termed “Catch Per Unit Effort” (CPUE) as inference to bird population integrity. Catch Per Unit Effort is essentially the amount of time spent hunting a bird species relative to how many are harvested during that time. It can be measured in hunting hours, days, or weeks per bird, for example.

This season, WDFW biologists present harvest-based population trends over the past few years. Below is a brief run-down of what to expect in eastern Washington.

FOREST GROUSE

Data suggests that harvest CPUE has been relatively stable since 2011, which points to stable ruffed and dusky grouse populations. Interestingly, the number of birds harvested per hunter day increased since 2011. Expect a similar season to 2016, but hold out hope for an epic day to be thrown into the mix.

PHEASANT

Nine pheasant release sites are located in southeast Washington, four of which (Hollebeke HMU, Mill Creek HMU, Rice Bar HMU, and Willow Bar HMU) are owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Two sites (Asotin WMA and the Hartsock Unit of the Wooten WMA) are WDFW-owned, and the rest are on private lands open to the public under WDFW’s Feel Free to Hunt access program.

Similar to grouse, pheasant harvest CPUE has been relatively stable since 2011, but the number of birds harvested per day has been steadily increasing over the years. Considering this, and the 2017 brood success, there is a chance this fall could provide phenomenal pheasant opportunity, but expect a season similar to 2016.

CALIFORNIA QUAIL

Among these three popular upland game birds, the California quail is the only species with a harvest CPUE greater than 1 bird per day over a 5-year average. Presently, coveys are large, with a wealth of young birds. 2017 may not prove to be an exceptional harvest year, but hunters should have ample opportunity.

For more information on the 2017 hunting season, visit the WDFW website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/prospects/.