

UPLAND GAME BIRD ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

FY 2011 ANNUAL REPORT



Prepared by



The Wildlife Division
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Exhibit 6

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INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) administers the statewide Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP), which is organized into two programs:

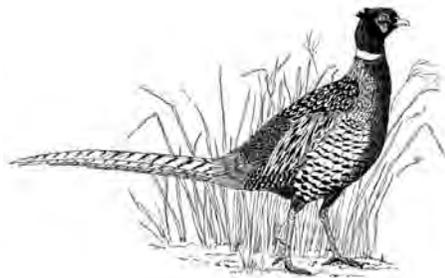
1. Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (Montana ARM 12.9.7)
2. Upland Game Bird Release Program (Montana ARM 12.9.6)

Regional wildlife staff play key roles to identify, negotiate, and implement UGBEP projects in cooperation with landowners and other agency staff. Program delivery, therefore, is largely a responsibility of wildlife field staff located throughout Montana. To further expand program delivery, three UGBEP biologists were hired in fiscal year (FY) 2010 whose chief responsibility is to implement the UGBEP in Regions 4, 6, and 7. Because of staffing turnover, only two full-time UGBEP biologists were on staff for the latter half of FY 2011.

The principle outcomes of the UGBEP are establishment or enhancement of upland game bird habitats; conservation of valuable game bird habitats; enhanced public upland game bird hunting opportunities; and pheasant releases and wild turkey transplants.

This fiscal year 2011 (July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011) annual report chronicles program activities, summarizes revenue and expenditures, and tabulates habitat enhancement projects and upland game bird releases initiated in FY 2011. Based on the contents in this report, the department and the UGBEP Advisory Council may evaluate program performance based on quantifiable objectives identified in the UGBEP Strategic Plan (July 2011).

The intended audience for this report is the UGBEP Council, Montana state legislators, FWP staff, and interested organizations and citizens.



FY 2011 REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES

Table 1 illustrates a breakdown of revenue and expenditures of the UGBEP. Relative to previous administrative expenditures, FY 2011 administrative costs were consequently lower because Pittman-Robertson federal dollars (\$109,473) were used to fund a portion of the three UGBEP field biologists' positions. Administrative expenditures for FY 2011 include all costs attributable to the overall operation and implementation of the program, including personal services and operations costs for the UGBEP coordinator. Examples of administrative costs include: salaries, benefits, computers, professional development, program advertizing/publications, and the UGBEP Council. The 12-member council met 4 times during FY 2011, and expenditures included daily honorariums, mileage and lodging costs, per-diem allowances, meeting room expenses, and administrative support.

Table 1. UGBEP revenue and spending during FY 2011 (87-1-246 and 87-1-247, MCA).

Income			Expenditures				Year End Balance
Beginning Balance	License Revenue ¹	Total Income	Bird Planting ²	Habitat Enhancement	Admin ³	Total Expenditures	
\$3,524,600	\$691,256	\$691,256	\$112,002	\$677,458	\$214,602	\$1,004,062	\$3,211,794

¹License revenue includes \$9,889 interest revenue.

²Expenditures include (1) pheasant releases, (2) turkey transplants, and (3) supplemental feeding.

³Expenditures include \$23,683 administrative costs for the UGBEP Citizens' Advisory Council (87-1-251, MCA) and \$56,272 overhead costs.

UPLAND GAME BIRD RELEASE PROGRAM

PHEASANT RELEASES – EXPENDITURES FY 2011

For FY 2011, 15% of the annual revenue (\$103,689) was set aside for activities related to upland game bird (UGB) releases (Table 2). Total expenditures slightly exceeded allocated funds for pheasant releases in FY 2011.

The cost per 10-week old pheasant was established at \$8.00 based on a query of pheasant raisers in March 2010. The total expenditure reported in Table 2 accounts for costs related to pheasant releases only. For FY 2011, 16% of the annual revenue was used to fund pheasant releases.

Table 2. Revenue and expenditure summary for pheasant releases during FY 2011.

15% Annual Revenue	Total Expenditures	% of Annual Revenue
\$103,689	\$107,889	16%

PHEASANT RELEASES – APPLICATIONS, CONTRACTS, AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Table 3 summarizes the total number of applications received by FWP and eligible contracts negotiated for the 2010 pheasant release (FY 2011).

Table 3. Fiscal Year 2011 - Summary of pheasant releases by region.

Region	Applications Received	Eligible Contracts (#)	Pheasants Released (#)	Acreage Open To Hunting
4	13	6	1,400	26,400
5	1	1	150	4,160
6	138	106	10,517	105,827
7	10	8	1,150	8,880
Total	162	121	13,217	145,267

TURKEY TRANSPLANTS

No wild turkey transplants occurred in FY 2011.

SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING

Supplemental feeding occurred in Region 6 during FY 2011. Emergency supplemental feeding criteria were met, and feeding was recommended on January 4, 2011. Interested volunteers were contacted on January 7, 2011, and feeding supplies were placed in Froid at Nelson Elevators. Packets of information were sent to the interested volunteers on January 8, 2011. A press release was issued for the week of January 10, 2011, and a radio report was aired in Plentywood on January 14, 2011.

Through March 2011, 7 volunteers placed feed at a total of 25 sites (7 located in Roosevelt County, 18 located in Sheridan County). Total expenditures for FY 2011 supplemental feeding were \$4,113. By comparison, 3 volunteers placed feed at 12 feeding sites for a total expenditure of \$989 in FY 2010.

FY 2011 UPLAND GAME BIRD RELEASE EXPENDITURES - SUMMARY

For FY 2011, 15% of the annual revenue (\$103,689) was set aside for activities related to UGB releases, which includes funding pheasant releases, wild turkey transplants, and supplemental feeding. Table 4 provides a summary of expenditures, which exceeded the funds set aside by \$8,313.

Table 4. Summary of expenditures for activities related to UGB releases in FY 2011.

Program	Expenditures
Pheasant Releases	\$107,889
Supplemental Feeding	\$4,113
Wild Bird Relocations	\$0
Total	\$112,002

UPLAND GAME BIRD HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

Upland game bird habitat needs vary by species, season, and life stage. The UGBEP cost-shares habitat enhancement activities and also funds conservation projects geared toward specific habitat requirements of the respective game bird species.

PROJECTS INITIATED IN FY 2011

The UGBHEP obligated funds for a combined total of 39 projects that comprised over 21,000 project acres (e.g., food plots, shelterbelts, leased acres). As a result of these 39 projects, approximately 57,000 acres of land were opened to reasonable public upland game bird hunting, accommodating an estimated 9,000 hunter-days (Table 5).

All FY 2011 UGBHEP contracts included shared funding or in-kind contributions from a variety of sources including private landowners, Pheasants Forever (PF) chapters, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs. Overall, UGBHEP funds made up about 36% of project costs, with cooperators and other partners contributing the balance. As of November 2011, the UGBHEP has a grand total 301 active contracts comprising nearly 320,000 habitat project acres with approximately 770,000 acres available for public upland game bird hunting.

UGBHEP projects done on publicly managed lands or lands actively enrolled in Block Management are parenthetically noted in the first column of Table 5. In the “Acres Open to Hunting” column, the “A” denotes access acres already accounted for in another project defined in the same UGBHEP contract.

Table 5. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during FY 2011.

Project Type	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Conservation Easement	4	Cascade	12/28/10	\$100,000	\$0	\$630,000	\$730,000	850	850
Conservation Easement	4	Fergus	10/15/10	\$200,000	\$0	\$104,000	\$304,000	800	2,000
Conservation Easement	6	Valley	10/12/10	\$80,679	\$0	\$0	\$80,679	164	164
Conservation Easement	6	Valley	01/14/11	\$100,000	\$0	\$237,623	\$337,623	463	463
Fence (FWP)	3	Beaverhead	02/28/11	\$3,000	\$500	\$3,000	\$6,500	0	A
Grazing Management	7	Dawson	03/15/11	\$84,730	\$79,330	\$0	\$164,060	5,590	5,590
Grazing Management (BMA)	3	Deer Lodge	05/10/11	\$10,100	\$6,500	\$9,800	\$26,400	5,200	2,500
Grazing Management (BMA)	7	Richland	06/03/11	\$18,953	\$18,384	\$52,013	\$89,350	6,685	6,685
Nesting Cover	4	Cascade	03/28/11	\$840	\$498	\$0	\$1,337	8	A
Nesting Cover (BLM)	7	Custer	07/07/10	\$1,849	\$616	\$0	\$2,465	10	210
Nesting Cover (BMA)	6	Daniels	06/09/11	\$8,960	\$2,990	\$11,950	\$23,900	640	640
Nesting Cover (FWP)	3	Beaverhead	02/28/11	\$2,548	\$1,631	\$0	\$4,179	1	A
Nesting Cover (FWP)	3	Beaverhead	02/28/11	\$2,200	\$1,000	\$50,000	\$53,200	150	A

Project Type – FY 2011 continued	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBHEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Nesting Cover (FWP)	3	Beaverhead	07/01/10	\$3,000	\$0	\$500	\$3,500	410	A
Nesting Cover (FWP)	4	Teton	03/10/11	\$1,599	\$533	\$3,600	\$5,732	43	12,000
Perennial Food Plot	7	Fallon	06/21/11	\$279	\$93	\$0	\$372	1	A
Shelterbelt	4	Cascade	03/28/11	\$22,159	\$7,464	\$13,119	\$42,742	15	480
Shelterbelt	7	Fallon	06/21/11	\$14,923	\$4,974	\$0	\$19,897	9	1,720
Shelterbelt	4	Pondera	04/07/11	\$9,369	\$8,962	\$0	\$18,331	8	1,545
Shelterbelt	6	Sheridan	10/15/10	\$1,469	\$877	\$0	\$2,346	2	2,150
Shelterbelt	4	Teton	08/31/10	\$6,660	\$3,873	\$0	\$10,533	3	1,157
Shelterbelt	4	Teton	08/31/10	\$4,918	\$2,145	\$0	\$7,063	3	A
Shelterbelt	4	Teton	08/31/10	\$2,762	\$1,595	\$0	\$4,357	2	A
Shelterbelt	4	Toole	02/18/11	\$6,339	\$2,182	\$0	\$8,521	2	1,005
Shelterbelt (BMA)	7	Richland	07/07/10	\$2,738	\$913	\$1,350	\$5,001	4	8,877
Shelterbelt (FWP)	3	Beaverhead	02/28/11	\$6,010	\$1,756	\$0	\$7,766	2	410

Project Type – FY 2011 continued	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBHEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Winter Food/Cover Plot	3	Beaverhead	02/28/11	\$170	\$0	\$0	\$170	2	A
Winter Food/Cover Plot	7	Custer	07/07/10	\$10,125	\$3,375	\$0	\$13,500	15	A
Winter Food/Cover Plot	7	Fallon	10/18/10	\$750	\$250	\$0	\$1,000	10	1,200
Winter Food/Cover Plot	7	McCone	07/07/10	\$750	\$250	\$0	\$1,000	10	2,240
Winter Food/Cover Plot	4	Pondera	04/08/11	\$2,700	\$1,200	\$0	\$3,900	18	243
Winter Food/Cover Plot	6	Sheridan	05/09/11	\$7,500	\$2,329	\$171	\$10,000	10	640
Winter Food/Cover Plot	6	Sheridan	05/09/11	\$5,229	\$1,800	\$171	\$7,200	12	2,390
Winter Food/Cover Plot	6	Sheridan	06/01/11	\$2,586	\$900	\$114	\$3,600	6	320
Winter Food/Cover Plot	6	Sheridan	06/09/11	\$2,700	\$900	\$0	\$3,600	18	1,438
Winter Food/Cover Plot	4	Teton	08/31/10	\$120	\$260	\$0	\$380	2	A
Winter Food/Cover Plot	4	Teton	08/31/10	\$120	\$260	\$0	\$380	2	A
Winter Food/Cover Plot	4	Teton	08/31/10	\$120	\$425	\$0	\$545	5	A
Winter Food/Cover Plot (BMA)	6	Roosevelt	06/02/11	\$393	\$150	\$57	\$600	3	100
Totals				\$729,346	\$158,915	\$1,117,467	\$2,005,728	21,179	57,017

Table 6 summarizes private land and public land contracts initiated in FY 2011.

Table 6. FY 2011 private/public land UGBHEP contracts.

Summary	Total Contracts	New UGBHEP Cooperators	Hunter-Days
Private Land	23	11	3,100
Public Land	3	3	5,220
TOTAL	26	14	8,320

The UGBEP works with a variety of partners, including state, federal, and county government agencies and nongovernmental conservation partners. Table 7 summarizes the partners who collaborated financially or provided technical assistance on projects initiated during FY 2011.

Table 7. Summary of agencies and conservation groups who partnered on UGBEP projects by FWP Region.

1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes 	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beaverhead Chapter Pheasants Forever Gallatin Valley PF Beaverhead NRCS Field Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> USFWS – Arctic Grayling Program BLM
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Montana Chapter PF Habitat Forever, Lewistown Headwaters Chapter PF Upper Missouri Chapter PF Pondera County NRCS Field Office Teton County NRCS Field Office Glacier County NRCS Field Office Toole County NRCS Field Office Cascade County NRCS Field Office Pondera/Teton Counties FSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MT Salinity Control Association Pondera Conservation District DNRC/State Lands staff in Conrad & Lewistown Pondera Country Canal & Reservoir Company Eastslope Kennels and Game Birds Alberta Conservation Association High Density Pheasants
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BLM – Billings Habitat Forever, Billings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yellowstone Valley Chapter PF
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sheridan County NRCS Field Office Roosevelt County NRCS Field Office Daniels County NRCS Field Office Flaxville Chapter Pheasants Forever Gallatin Valley Chapter PF Sheridan County Conservation District Roosevelt County Conservation District Sheridan County Commissioners Daniels County Conservation District Roosevelt County FSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daniels County FSA Sheridan County FSA National Wild Turkey Federation Sheridan County Road Department Medicine Lake NWR East End Colony Ken’s Bird Farm Sorenson’s Bird Farm

7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Richland County NRCS Field Office • Carter County NRCS Field Office • Baker County NRCS Field Office • Custer County NTCS Field Office • BLM (Miles City) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandstone Chapter Pheasants Forever • Tongue River Chapter PF • Birds of Plenty
HQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat Forever – National Office • FSA State Office • NRCS State Office • DNRC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Wild Turkey Federation • Pheasants Forever – National, Regional offices

MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING

Partnerships identified through three Memoranda of Understanding initiated in June 2008 continued upland game bird habitat enhancement efforts in FY 2011 (not identified in Table 5). Two MOUs with Habitat Forever (HF) involve continued habitat enhancements along the Yellowstone River (Region 5, Billings) and in the Denton area (Region 4, Lewistown). The third MOU is between FWP and Sheridan County. Accomplishments are described below for each of the MOU.

1. Billings-based Habitat Specialist (FWP/HF/BLM MOU)

Partnership funding in support of the Billings Habitat Forever farming position and associated work is intended for restoring and enhancing pheasant and other upland game bird habitat on public lands open to hunting along the Yellowstone River and its major tributaries in Yellowstone, Treasure, Stillwater, Carbon, Bighorn, and Sweetgrass Counties in Montana. During the third year of this program, efforts will continue to be focused on three tracts of public land, two in the Pompeys Pillar area and one near Laurel. High priority projects on other sites will be considered as time allows.

Projects are defined as work items on identified tracts of ground. Project types include: irrigated food plot, dry land food plot, irrigated nesting cover, dry land nesting cover, irrigated brood plots, wetland development, water development, riparian vegetation management, and shelterbelt/winter cover plantings and maintenance.

Early in 2011, cold spring temperatures, excessive rainfall, micro-bursts, flooding, and oil contamination combined to make farming efforts a real challenge this spring and summer. Specifically:

- Below average temperatures and precipitation in March and April made it difficult to burn crop residues off the food plots in preparation for spring planting. Cold soil temperatures further delayed planting.
- May and June brought excessive amounts of rainfall to the area and kept farm equipment out of the fields due to the wet soil. Food plot sites were not able to be

prepped for planting and fallow areas could not be worked or sprayed. In many cases, weed growth was not treated as early as it should have been.

- A micro-burst picked up a small storage shed and tossed it into the east pivot at Yellowstone WMA (YWMA) in early June and did substantial damage to the structure. Fortunately, adequate precipitation kept the crops from burning up until the pivot was repaired in late July.
- Flooding of the Yellowstone River began in mid May and lasted through early July. At first, a combination of heavy downpours and snow melt were the primary cause, later on it was mostly due to snow melt. Planted fields at YWMA and Sundance Special Recreation Management Area (SDSRMA) were affected with portions of them dying out from prolonged submergence in water. The remaining portions of these fields recovered but remained wet for extended periods and made weed control efforts difficult. A new 3-acre dense nesting cover test plot on the west pivot may have been lost because it could not be irrigated after seeding in mid June.
- On July 1 an oil pipeline ruptured underneath the Yellowstone River near Laurel. Croplands at SDSRMA and YWMA were affected. Specifics have not been determined yet but early indications are that these sites will need to follow a treatment prescription to insure that all traces of oil are removed from the area. This may involve farming the affected area and harvesting it to remove all biomass. This will be done in 2011 and 2012. Staff are currently working with ExxonMobil on a claim to insure that the process is carried out correctly and that reimbursements are made.

Progress for the first half of 2011 has been negligible. In fact, past treatment areas may have been lost because of delays in field treatments. Areas being prepped for dense nesting cover seeding may need to be fallowed another year since weed growth could not be controlled in a timely manner. Most of food plots that were planted have established but some likely did not have enough time to mature and produce a viable winter food source for wildlife. The food plots will be left over the winter for cover. Delays caused by weather related repairs, flooding, and responses to oil contamination have decreased efficiency and has kept staff into a “maintenance only” mode, with no new projects planned at this time.

Project and maintenance summaries are documented in Tables 8 through 10 for Pompey’s Pillar, Sundance SRMA, Yellowstone WMA , respectively.

Table 8. Pompey’s Pillar - BLM: Project and maintenance summaries

Project Type	Project Sites (#)	Total acres
Nesting Cover (Irrigated)	9	118
Nesting Cover/Shelterbelt (Irrigated)	1	4.0
Food Plot (Irrigated)	3	47.4
Brood Plot	1	3
Riparian Vegetation Management	2	121
Total	16	293.4

Table 9. Sundance SRMA - BLM: Project and maintenance summaries

Project Type	# of Project Sites	Total acres
Nesting Cover (Irrigated)	1	6.8
Nesting Cover (Dryland)	2	72.6
Food Plot (Irrigated)	5	29.3
Food Plot/Nesting Cover	1	36
Riparian Vegetation Management	1	0.5
Total	10	145.2

Table 10. Yellowstone WMA – FWP: Project and maintenance summaries

Project Type	# of Project Sites	Total acres
Nesting Cover (Irrigated)	3	51.1
Nesting Cover (Dryland)	6	31.9
Food Plot (Irrigated)	2	20.8
Wetland Development	3	25.8
Shelterbelt	1	2
Shelterbelt + Brood Plot	1	0.2
Total	16	131.8

In FY 2011, the UGBEP contributed \$50,601 to enhance or develop 570 acres of shelterbelts, irrigated food plots, and nesting cover on public lands that provided a combined total of 4,830 acres of public access.

2. Denton-based Habitat Specialist (FWP/HF MOU)

The following projects have been developed on the respective properties by the Central Montana Chapter of Pheasants Forever and the Habitat Forever Technician. The PF Coffee Creek projects were established prior to the creation of the Habitat Forever/FWP MOU. All current work on PF Coffee Creek is maintenance.

During 2011, site preparation was conducted on PF Wolf Creek, DNRC Wolf Creek and Beckman WMA. Planting of shelterbelts took place in the spring of 2011. Shelterbelts range from 3 to 12 rows, with 7 rows of trees the average. Two rows of silver sagebrush were planted on 2 sites, with one planting 6 miles long and the other planting over 2 miles long.

The severe flooding on the Judith River bottom on the Beckman WMA adversely affected food plots and irrigated alfalfa fields. Food plots will be evaluated and adjustments made as needed. A very small percentage of 2011 shrubs and trees died last year but will be replaced spring 2012.

Project and maintenance summaries are documented in Tables 11 through 14 for PF Coffee Creek, PF Wolf Creek, DNRC Wolf Creek, Beckman WMA , respectively.

Table 11. PF Coffee Creek: Project and maintenance summaries

Project Type	# of Projects	Total acres
Food Plots	8	36.8
Shelterbelts	12	34.3
Total	20	71.1

Table 12. PF Wolf Creek: Project and maintenance summaries

Project Type	# of Projects	Total acres
Shelterbelts	4	8.7
Deer Fence	1	17.4
Total	5	26.1

Table 13. DNRC Wolf Creek: Project and maintenance summaries

Project Type	# of Projects	Total acres
Shelterbelt	1	4.3

Table 14. Beckman WMA: Project and maintenance summaries

Project Type	# of Projects	Total acres
Food Plots	9	26
Shelterbelts	4	15.1
Total	13	41.1

In FY 2011, the UGBEP contributed \$44,991 to enhance 143 project acres by planting and managing shelterbelts, food plots, and silver sagebrush establishment/augmentation on lands managed by FWP and private lands that provide a combined total of 9,000 acres of public access.

3. FWP Sheridan County (MOU)

Renewed in FY 2011 for an additional 5 years, the purpose of this MOU is to restore and enhance wildlife habitat primarily for pheasants and other game birds on public and private lands within Sheridan County, Montana. Specifically, this MOU develops and supports a farming position to provide tillage, planting, and other farming operations where public upland game bird hunting opportunities exist.

Similar to the MOU with Habitat Forever and partners, the Sheridan County MOU increases on the ground capacity to improve habitat for upland game birds while promoting public exposure of, participation in, and support for the UGBHEP. The local Chamber of Commerce has also committed to help promote the terms of this MOU to private landowners to expand the

capacity and quality of pheasant hunting, realizing the economic benefits of upland bird hunting to local businesses. During FY 2011, this MOU was renewed for an additional 5 years.

In FY 2011, one food plot comprised of 5 acres was accomplished through this MOU. Total UGBEP expenditures was \$689.

EXPIRED PROJECTS - FY 2011

Forty-one UGBEP habitat contracts, totaling 9,800 project acres, expired statewide in FY 2011 (Table 15). Approximately 66,000 access acres were associated with the expiring contracts; however 46,300 “UGBEP project-enhanced” acres remain accessible to upland bird hunters because enhancement activities were conducted on lands enrolled either in the Block Management Program or occurred on public lands.

With the total project acres expiring in FY 2011 (9,800 acres) and total project acres initiated in FY 2011 (21,179), the net gain for project acreage was 11,379 acres. Likewise, a net gain of 37,317 access acres was realized based on contracts expiring (19,700 access acres) and projects initiated (57,017 access acres) during FY 2011.

Table 15. UGBEP habitat contracts that expired in FY 2011.

Regions	Grazing Management	Nesting Cover	Shelterbelts	Winter Food/ Cover Plots	Total Expired Projects
2			1	1	2
3			1		1
4		4	6		10
5		1	3	1	5
6		5	8		13
7	1	5	4		10
TOTAL	1	15	23	2	41

OBLIGATED FUNDS – HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROJECTS

Table 16 reports the obligated funds, amounts paid, and remaining balances for FY 2007 through FY 2011. For contracts initiated in FY 2011, UGBHEP (not including funds used for conservation easements) obligated a total of \$246,928, of which \$88,762 has been paid.

Table 16. UGBHEP obligated funds and remaining balances for UGBEP habitat projects, FY 2007 through FY 2011.

Total UGBHEP Obligated Funds (FY 2007 – FY 2011)	Paid to Date	Remaining Balance
\$1,124,065	\$842,955	\$281,110

UPLAND GAME BIRD ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM PROJECTS ACCESS GUIDE

Montana FWP publishes an annual hunting access guide with maps depicting UGBEP habitat project locations and pheasant release sites. The *UGBEP Projects Access Guide* provides a description of the habitat projects, preferred method of landowner contact, and number of huntable acres. A comment card is also included with the guide for hunters to communicate user information to FWP.

During FY 2011 (2010 hunting season), FWP received approximately 120 web requests for the Access Guide and distributed an additional 5,500 guides through FWP offices around the state. During the FY 2011 hunting season, the UGBEP Access Guide located on the web site received over 2,600 unique “hits” since September 1, 2010.

In FY 2011, the print cost for 5,000 guides was \$9,308.

UPLAND GAME BIRD ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM WEB SITE

The UGBEP web site provides the public with information relative to the program, Council, and the strategic plan. Web site traffic was monitored for FY 2011.

Web page traffic is characterized as a “pageview” or “PV.” A pageview is defined as a view of a page on the web site that is being tracked by the Analytics tracking code. If a visitor hits reload after reaching the page, this will be counted as an additional pageview. If a user navigates to a different page and then returns to the original page, a second pageview will be recorded as well. (Google Analytics, Assessed March 1, 2012.

http://support.google.com/googleanalytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=57164#pageviews_vs_unique_views

Figure 1 provides an overview of web traffic in FY 2011. Significant web activity spiked around August, likely due to hunters visiting the program web page. An additional spike was observed in March and April 2011 when the CRP seed cost-share was announced. In May 2011, another spike may represent the public’s response to FWP’s public announcement for comments on the new UGBEP strategic plan.

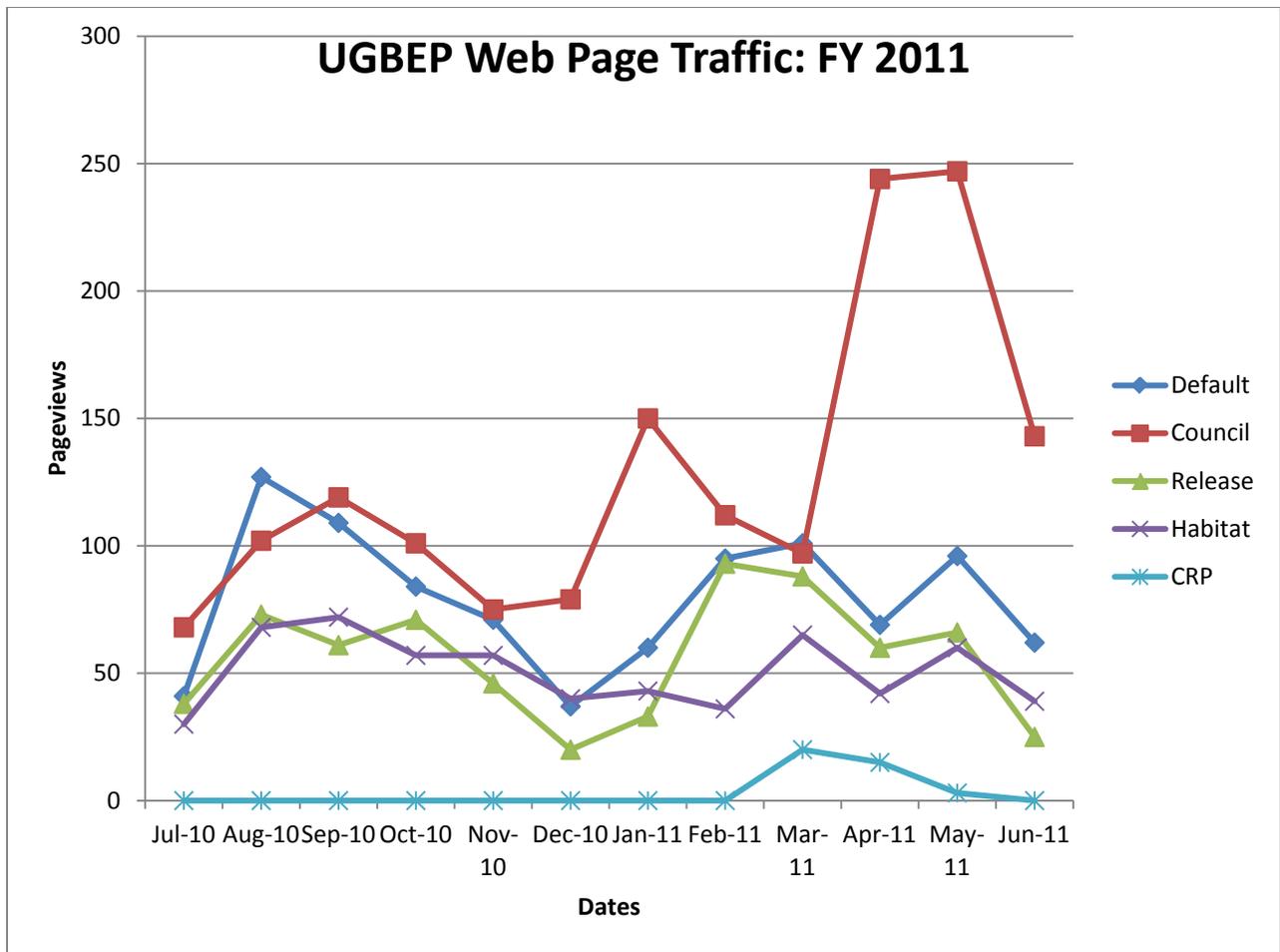


Figure 1. An overview of traffic on the UGBEP web pages for FY 2011.

OUTREACH

Personal visits with potential cooperators and phone calls are extremely effective tools to communicate program opportunities. The UGBEP is also promoted to the public in a number of different ways. News releases, presentations, and program information posted on the web site are the most common means to convey program information to the general public en masse. Tables 17 - 19 summarize outreach events at regional offices and Helena headquarters in FY 2011.



Table 17. News releases, videos, and articles published on the UGBEP by Region.

2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salmon Lake program on the UGBEP • Public comments sought on Strategic Plan
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 (to include Alberta Conservation Association and Ed Smith’s pheasant brood strip presentation) • 1 Public Service announcements
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All HQ news releases were forwarded to R6 media list (n = 6) • 1 release sent out independent of Helena HQ (seeking comment on strategic plan) • 4 weekly radio reports
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 news releases (1 general, 1 CRP Cost-share, 1 strategic plan open house)
HQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Montana Outdoors article (Sept/Oct 2011) • Council Meeting – 2 • Pheasant Release applications – 2 • New program opportunity (CRP seed cost-share) – 2 • Public comments sought on Strategic Plan – 2 • Video: Upland Birds (10/12/2011) • Video: Upland Bird Work (11/08/2010)
TOTAL	31 news releases, radio reports, public service announcements, and videos were released between October 2010 – October 2011.

Table 18. Presentations held for the UGBEP by Region.

1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Strategic Plan comment period open house
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salmon Lake program on the UGBEP • Draft Strategic Plan comment period open house • Big Sky Upland Game Bird Association
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Strategic Plan comment period open house • Beaverhead Conservation District
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Strategic Plan comment period open house • 8 (to include Liberty County NRCS Field Office, Watershed Districts, County Extension Offices, and Conservation Districts)
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Strategic Plan comment period open house
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Strategic Plan comment period open house • 4 (to include pheasant raisers, general public meetings)
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Strategic Plan comment period open house • UGBEP Strategic plan 3 times (public comment, regional meeting, Northern Great Plains Joint Venture) • Sandstone Chapter of Pheasants Forever banquet - UGBHEP promotional presentation • BLM/NRCS sage grouse initiative meeting in Miles City - UGBHEP promotional presentation • BLM presentation on UGBHEP (Dale Tribby)
HQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Strategic Plan comment period open house • 2 presentations given at FWP Commission meetings
TOTAL	31 presentations

Table 19. Letters sent to cooperators and partners regarding the UGBEP.

Region 4	18 letters to cooperators to follow up monitoring outcomes
Region 6	Approximately 20 to 40 (to include correspondence with Ed Smith and pheasant raisers)
Region 7	10 to cooperators, 75 informational handouts passed out at meetings and other opportunities
HQ	104 (to include welcome letters, requests for information, status of UGBHEP contracts, status of pheasant release program) Correspondences with pheasant raisers include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January – Program implementation needs based on annual revenue • April – Established price for 10-week old pheasants • July – Approximate number of pheasants needed by region based on program funds and eligible applications

HUNTER SURVEY

For the FY 2011 Access Guide (published for the 2010 hunting season), a total of five hunter survey cards were returned to FWP. Although this small survey response (less than 0.1% return rate) does not accurately reflect hunter satisfaction and use, a breakdown of the 5 responses are found in Tables 20 and 21.

All 5 respondents were Montanan residents, with only 60% reported hunting on UGBEP projects (Table 20). Table 21 reports one respondent was “dissatisfied” (20%) and two individuals were “very dissatisfied” (40%). Only 2 individuals (40%) reported they were “satisfied” with the UGBEP.

Twenty respondents provided their input with the level of satisfaction with the UGBEP (Table 20). All hunter comments follow, including those comments from hunters who did not hunt UGBEP projects.

Table 20. Summary of respondents and use of UGBEP projects

Respondents			Hunt on UGBEP Projects	
	Number	%	Yes	No
Resident	5	100	Resident	3
Nonresident	0	0	Nonresident	NA
Total	5		14	40

Table 21. Satisfaction level of UGBEP Projects

UGBEP Project Satisfaction Level (N = 20)				
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Resident	0	2	1	2
Nonresident	NA	NA	NA	NA
	0	2	1	2

Comments received specific to the 2010 UGBEP Access Guide

“Planting pheasants one month before season does not provide opportunities to hunters. Stop this program. Enhancing habitat will improve hunters opportunities. CRP and lots of it produces birds!!”

“Very Dissatisfied only with Project #1005, area 7. Otherwise, very much like the program. Hope you can expand it especially nesting cover, a.k.a., CRP.”

“More FWP dollars for NATIVE birds and less emphasis on pheasant projects that are basically “put and take !!”

“I do like the map and in no way means any dissatisfaction, very nice publication, Thanks.”

MONITORING CONTRACTS

During FY 2011, UGB Biologists visited a total of 51 active project sites to evaluate the status and productivity of shelterbelts, food and cover plots, dense nesting cover, and grazing management projects. Their monitoring reports summarized the assessments on standardized forms and included photographs of project components. In addition to project assessment, the contractors ensured each UGBHEP project had program signs with correct landowner contact information. Where needed, the contractors posted new signs and updated landowner contact information.

UGBEP DATABASE

Work continues to reconcile the database with information contained in headquarter files, albeit at a slow pace. FWP recently hired a statistician technician in September 2011 who will assume the database work. The coordinator is currently working with the statistician technician to go over verification and checking processes.

FY 2011 NOTABLE EVENTS

In addition to the information contained in this report, several unique events have impacted the UGBEP program during FY 2011 that are worth reporting.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The draft strategic plan was finalized by the UGBEP Council and FWP staff on February 15, 2011. The formal comment period was functionally initiated April 14, 2011 with that day’s FWP Commission process and adoptions. An “interested person” letter generally describing the proposed draft UGBEP Strategic Plan was posted on the website and mailed to an established

list of interested parties. Electronic copies of the plan were available on the FWP web site. Hard copies were available at the public meetings and were also distributed upon request.

FWP received comments on the UGBEP Draft Strategic Plan via the website (Survey Monkey), email, hard copy mailings, and at public meetings held in all seven Regional Headquarters and Helena Headquarters on May 18, 2011. In all, 53 comment entries were received through the deadline of 5:00 PM, June 06, 2011: 19 comment entries were received electronically via the Survey Monkey web interface; 10 written/email comments from the general public; and 24 comments received during the Regional public meetings. All comments were from Montana addresses and included unique inputs as well as common or repeating messages referencing the local, regional, and/or statewide scale of circumstances, management, or advocacy. Appendix A contains the summary report of comments received and Council's response.

The final draft UGBEP Strategic Plan was endorsed by the FWP Commission on July 14, 2011. At that point, FWP began the transition process by drafting proposed modifications to ARM Rules (12.9.6 and 12.9.7, ARM); updating and revising UGBHEP contracts and grazing agreements; and initial discussions on a programmatic environmental assessment.

ENERGY PRODUCTION

Energy exploration and production appears to be impacting program implementation in Regions 6 and 7. In Region 7, three different law offices contacted the UGBEP to request copies of UGBEP contracts on project areas where they proposed to do oil/gas exploration. Similarly in Region 6, it has been noted by many individuals that motels and hotels are full year-round. It is assumed that lodging once available to upland game bird hunters is now difficult to find.

WEATHER

Record snowfalls around the state compounded by wet springs and season-long flooding events all but comprised most facets of UGBEP implementation and enhancement work. During habitat evaluations for pheasant releases and CRP seed cost-share proposals (late May and most of June), biologists faced severe flooding in Regions 4, 5, 6, and 7. Efforts to assess habitat sites were impeded for the most part, and biologists relied more on tools such as aerial maps and their familiarity of the land to conduct their assessments.

New shelterbelt establishments in Region 4 were challenging because of the flooding. UGBHEP paid for trees and shrubs as outlined in the contracts, yet some trees could not be planted during the window of opportunity. Those trees that were planted were subjected to flooding with nearly 100% mortality. Soils were too saturated this fall to try and plant replacement trees. Flooding also took out some fields on project areas enhanced by the Habitat Specialist in Denton.

In Region 5, severe flooding and the oil spill impeded several UGBHEP projects. Some pivots were destroyed and fields were severely eroded. Oil spill cleanup efforts were a precedent in Region 5, although enhancement work did occur.

VOLUNTARY PUBLIC ACCESS AND HABITAT INCENTIVE PROGRAM (VPA-HIP)

A USDA grant for nearly \$1 million dollars was awarded to FWP in FY 2011 to fund opportunities to expand access. Specifically, the UGBEP would administer contracts on sites with high value upland game bird habitats (e.g., CRP). FWP recently was apprised that the Farm Service Agency (FSA) may not be able to release funds previously obligated for the VPA-HIP programs due in part because of the potential status of the agriculture appropriations bill. At the time of this report, FWP does not know the current outcome of this bill.

Appendix A: Summary of Public Comments received on the UGBEP Strategic Plan Draft

Public comments were received by June 6, 2011.

This summary report represents an effort to enumerate rationales and values that *repeatedly* surfaced in public comment, listed here in no specific defined order, and as they pertained specifically to the UGBEP Draft Strategic Plan. Moreover, this document is not a tabulation of supporting vs. opposing comment numbers.

Consistent Themes (Wording in bold reflect Council's input)

- Eliminate supplemental feeding because of costs and lack of long-term effectiveness
Supplemental feeding is addressed by statute and ARM Rule. Council holds their position to limit emergency supplemental feeding to Sheridan, Roosevelt, and Daniels counties.
- Eliminate pheasant releases because of costs and lack of long-term effectiveness
Funding pheasant releases is a statutory requirement. In the draft plan and located under the section, "Council Recommendations for Future Consideration," the Council states: *While recognizing social and economic values, it is the recommendation of this Council to gradually eliminate investment in pheasant releases and transfer those funds to habitat enhancement. Three members of the Council opposed this motion, which received majority support.*
- Support the conservation of Russian olive trees on upland sites
In the draft plan and under the section, "Council Recommendations for Future Consideration," the Council states: *Council recognizes the value of Russian olive as an effective source of food and woody cover outside riparian areas and subirrigated habitats. The Council further encourages FWP to conserve Russian olive on strategically located dryland sites for food and winter cover.*
- Focus/emphasis on habitat enhancement efforts rather than bird releases
In the draft Strategic Plan, the Council listed habitat enhancement efforts as a guiding principle in program implementation but acknowledges that pheasant releases are a statutory requirement.
- Support for proposed funding allocations for pheasant releases, turkey transplants, and supplemental feeding (to include those counties identified in the plan).
Council holds their position on funding allocations.
- Emphasis should be on public lands; seek interagency partnerships on publically controlled lands; improve communication and cooperation with DNRC.
Currently, ARM 12.9.703(3) emphasizes program implementation on private lands. Council holds on their position to have equal emphasis on private and public lands.

- Hunting access: need assurances that opportunities are unbiased and equal
The contract language addresses the requirement for opportunities that are “unbiased and equal” for all hunters. Council also advises the department to assess access through discussions with Cooperators during scheduled monitoring.

- Reconsider \$200,000 cap – could limit opportunity on future enhancement efforts on public lands
Council held additional discussion on this subject and revisited “project” definition. When specific activities are done annually to maintain the project, Council advises that these maintenance activities should not be included in the ARM definition of “project.” Council advises FWP to develop program language that distinguishes project and maintenance definitions.

- Program focus should be on Block Management areas.
Access strategies include an emphasis for UGBEP projects on lands enrolled in Block Management (page 97).

- Predator control/management should be incorporated into the strategic plan.
Strategies for predator control or management will not be identified in the UGBEP strategic plan. This plan is primarily habitat-focused. Productive and effective habitat will reduce the need for predator control.

Other Comments

- Record contracts for long-term, higher dollar amounts, not for short term, lower-budget contracts; recording projects greater than 1 year on deeds may be a “red flag” to potential landowners.
Council holds their position on recording contracts. In the future, the Council will re-evaluate all aspects of the Strategic Plan, to include recording contracts.

- Include a map of Montana with regional boundaries defined
A map will be developed that clearly identifies regional boundaries that will also show regional headquarters.

- Streamline the application process for habitat projects
Council has recognized the need to efficiently implement the UGBEP while maintaining a high degree of accountability.

- Focus on clustering project vs. “scattering” projects across the landscape
Focus areas are identified in the regional strategic plans.

- Inventory publically managed lands to determine potential enhancement efforts
Inventorying publically managed lands is not within the scope of this strategic plan.
- Pursue fee-title purchase/easement acquisition on quality habitats that provide access in perpetuity.
Fee title lands cannot be purchased with UGBEP dollars as per statute.
- Region 4: Plan should account for the likely reduction of CRP; establish greater communication between Block Management program and UGBEP; plan did not cover dryland farming/agricultural habitats
Region 4 is aware of these comments.
- Funding allocation – high fixed costs (pheasant releases and UGB Biologists’ salaries) prevent more money from “hitting the ground.”
The UGB Biologists are essential for program implementation as demonstrated by the increase in quality projects hitting the ground since the biologists were hired.
- Too much emphasis on nonnative pheasants – not enough on native mountain grouse
Council understands and also acknowledges that other criticisms state that there is not enough emphasis on pheasants.
- Program emphasis should focus on CRP enrollment and renovation activities
Recent program activity addresses seed cost-shares for high value CRP mixes. Council acknowledges the importance of CRP renovation.
- Need an UGBH biologist stationed in Lewistown
One UGB Habitat biologist is already stationed in Conrad, and it would be difficult to justify an additional UGB biologist position when other regions may warrant such a position.
- Plan should proposed an “upper limit” on % dollars spent on administering the program
Revenue and expenditures will be reviewed by the Council annually. Council supports the current positions administering the UGBEP.
- Plan should consider how to improve grazing management on public lands, to include leasing inexpensive grazing leases
Plan emphasizes the need to leverage dollars with other agency programs to fund grazing systems. Leasing inexpensive grazing leases is not within the scope of the UGBEP.
- Plan should promote youth hunting opportunities
All hunter license dollars fund the UGBEP. Council does support youth hunting activities but encourages equality for all hunters who hunt on UGBEP projects. Pheasant regulations do provide an early season for youth.
- Support for performance measures

Council holds their position.

- Monitoring should take into account bird populations, bird indices, harvest success – FWP should partner with Universities and other groups to get meaningful information.
FWP staff currently conduct these activities.
- Plan should address how to improve Hungarian partridge habitat
Hungarian partridge habitat is regional and addressed in the regional plans as warranted.
- Land managers should consider reintroduction of sharp-tailed grouse in Regions 1 and 2.
See regional plans.
- Identify and establish relationships with organic farming and ranching operations
Partnerships are encouraged for all who are eligible to participate in the UGBEP.
- Several comments submitted on ARM – abolish or modify pheasant ratio, release dates.
In terms of the above comment, ARM will be left as is.
- Recommendation to supplemental feed in 3 counties not supported – FWP should use the US Weather Service and US Dept. of Ag data to determine the need to supplemental feed state-wide.
Council maintains their position to focus feeding efforts in Sheridan, Daniels, and Roosevelt counties.
- Supplemental feeding should be a line item and moved over to the remaining 85% of the funds.
As stated in ARM, supplemental feeding is an “activity related to pheasant releases,” and will remain under the Upland Game Bird Release Program ARM.
- Regarding Billings-area enhancement efforts – disagree with the monetary limits set on enhancement projects. Ongoing efforts on public lands are likely the only opportunity for Region 5.
Council has re-evaluated this situation and has made new recommendations to FWP to define maintenance activities, which will not be restricted under the funding cap for “projects.”
- Continue efforts with private landowners – they are key to habitat conservation.
Council agrees with the statement.
- Birds need to go on WMA and other public lands.
Pheasant releases on private lands open up those lands to public access. Council maintains their position.
- Coordinate with federal agencies to decimate Russian olive trees

As stated in the above section, Council maintains their position and recognizes the value of Russian olive as an effective source of food and woody cover outside riparian areas and subirrigated habitats.

- Should not with partner Block Management projects - double-compensates the landowner
Landowners may participate concurrently in the UGBEP and Block Management program as defined by statute (87-1-249(2)(b)).
- Include “pollinator strips” in brood strips section of the plan.
“Pollinator strips” will be added to the plan.
- Region 3 – need to state how program implementation is done. PF Chapter? Intern?
Program oversight in future years will provide updates to the Region 3 plan.
- Region 6: need to state that the pheasant release program is not working as the legislature has intended.
Council acknowledges that the pheasant release program is a statutory requirement that provides additional access acres and is also an important socio-economic in several areas of Montana.
- Nesting cover – address need to rejuvenate stand at least one time (year 6) during the contract period (no more than half in one time period)
Ground disturbing activities are incorporated in program implementation as needed.
- Provide no-till drills for private landowners
May be considered for future considerations. Council advises FWP to identify those counties who may already have drills available for UGBHEP projects.
- Update sage-grouse core area map to include area 18-miles north of Malta; update turkey distribution map to include west of Malta; include BLM description (p. 66) and identify Pheasants Unlimited (p.70), and consider adding Weigand and Janson’s book on pheasants to literature cited section.
Strategic plan was not soliciting comments on UGB distributions and refers these comments to Region 6. Referencing specific BLM program descriptions (e.g., Sike’s Act) is not warranted at this section of the plan. Identifying BLM is appropriate.
- Habitat contracts should be for a longer period of time.
The strategic plan identifies habitat contract length as a mechanism to negotiate contracts, to include longer contract terms.
- Community should be behind the program for economic benefits
Council supports this statement.

- \$2.00 per resident ugb license is “embarrassingly” low for program contribution.
An increase in funds from license dollars will likely not occur until the fund balance is reduced.

- Plan needs to address the adverse impacts of burning big sagebrush
Council acknowledges that impacts/conversions to all habitat community types could have potentially adverse effects to native upland game birds – examples include burning sagebrush-grassland communities or conversion of native soils.

- Contracts should have shorter terms for greater landowner buy in ~ suggest 5 years
The overall habitat benefits to upland game birds are often not realized until after 3 or more years, depending on weather conditions. Shelterbelt establishments may take 10 years or more to have realized benefits to upland game birds. Council maintains their position.