

Voluntary conservation programs payoff

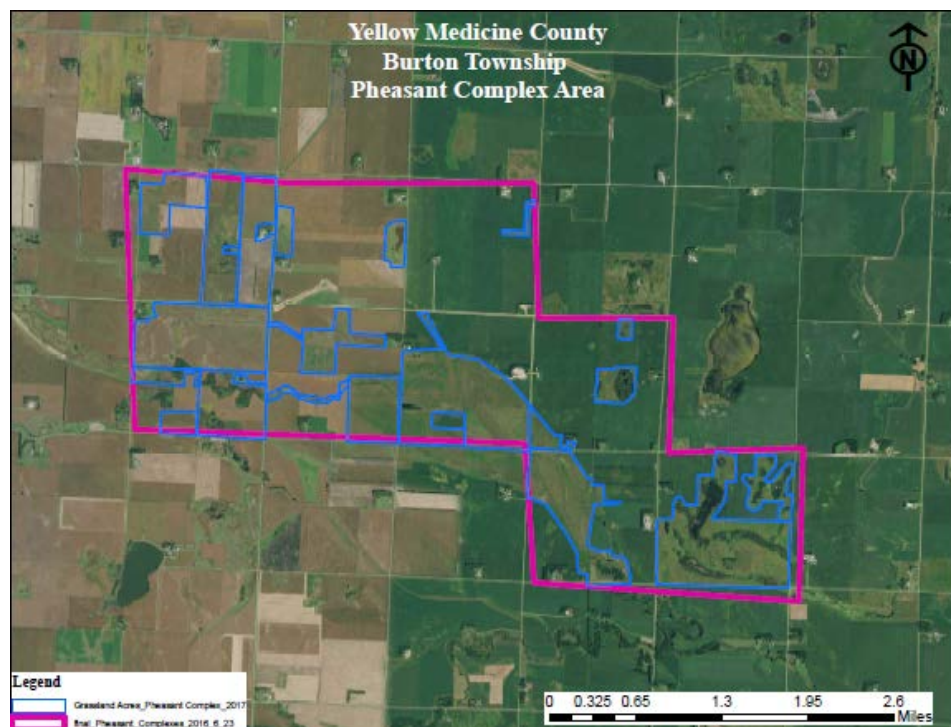
November 2017 Snapshots

In December 2014 Governor Mark Dayton brought together 250 outdoor recreationalists and landowners for the Minnesota Pheasant Summit in Marshall. The purpose of the summit was to provide attendees the opportunity to hear experts discuss pheasant population numbers and habitat requirements. With this information in hand, summit attendees began small group discussions to identify priorities and the processes needed to address Minnesota's declining pheasant population and diminishing hunting license sales.

The results of the Pheasant Summit, as well as an online survey were refined and categorized into 10 different [Pheasant action items](#): (1.) Target habitat efforts, (2.) More habitat on private land, (3.) Farm Bill Assistance Partnership, (4.) More habitat management, (5.) More public lands, (6.) Buffer strips, (7.) Better roadside habitat, (8.) Maintain walk-in access, (9.) Expand citizen education, and (10.) More habitat research.

[The 2015 Minnesota Pheasant Summit Action Plan](#) was later created to establish short-term and long-term goals to address the desired outcomes of the 10 action items.

Since then the Yellow Medicine Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD),



9 square mile target area boundary

the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR), and Pheasants Forever have worked with landowners to protect and establish habitat through voluntary programs and acquisitions that accomplish the goals of the pheasant summit action plan--specifically, the "Target Habitat Efforts" action item.

The action item encourages agencies and landowners to establish 9 square mile complexes with the goal of achieving 40% grassland cover in the target area, preferably through permanent protection measures. Greg Hoch, MN DNR Prairie Habitat Team Supervisor, talked about planning and targeting restoration protection of grasslands in the Minnesota pheasant range. "The conservation community has learned that it's really best to manage wildlife habitat at the landscape level, not the individual parcel."

With landscape in mind, the MN DNR and the Yellow Medicine SWCD identified several target habitat complexes and worked with landowners in these locations to make them aware of the voluntary conservation program available to them.



Restored native prairie site.

Landowners in one area of Yellow Medicine County were willing to expand on the existing grasslands by placing more marginal acres into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) because of a strong history of working together with the MN DNR and the Yellow Medicine SWCD. Thanks to the dedicated work of the SWCD and the DNR; along with willing landowners, the Burton Township Pheasant Complex Target Area achieved the goal of 40% grassland in just two years.

Together they added two new Wildlife Management Areas totaling 310 acres and enrolled 143 acres of new CRP. Ian Olson, Environmental Resource Specialist with Yellow Medicine SCWD was excited about the work, "Through programs such as CRP, CREP, and RIM Yellow Medicine County landowners were able to work with Farm Service Agency,

Natural Resources Conservation Service and Yellow Medicine SWCD staff to complete the goals within the 9 square mile pheasant habitat complex. More than 40% of the 9 square mile complex is within some sort of grassland. "

Those efforts, combined with existing grasslands, total 2,352 acres of grassland or 41% of the nine-square mile target area. Ian went on to say that the area is also 100% compliant with Minnesota's Buffer Law.