



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

DRAFT PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)

Annual Release of Pen-raised Ring-necked Pheasants

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action

Annual release of pen-raised ring-necked pheasants on suitable state lands.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action

A. Authority to release pheasants, with regard to the control of importation for introduction and transplantation or introduction of wildlife, 87-5-711, MCA:

(1) Except as otherwise provided, the importation for introduction or the transplantation or introduction of any wildlife is prohibited unless the commission determines, based upon scientific investigation and after public hearing, that a species of wildlife poses no threat of harm to native wildlife and plants or to agricultural production and that the transplantation or introduction of a species has significant public benefits.

(2) With regard to the transplantation or introduction of a fish species not previously legally transplanted to a specific water body within the state or not previously legally introduced to the state, the requirement for scientific investigation in subsection (1) may be satisfied only by completion of an environmental review conforming to the provisions of Title 75, chapter 1, part 2.

B. Authority to release pheasants, with regard to the control of wildlife species permitted to be transplanted or introduced, 87-5-713, MCA:

*Any wildlife species listed in **87-5-714** or approved by the commission for introduction or transplantation may be introduced or transplanted only subject to a plan developed by the department to assure that the population can be controlled if any unforeseen harm should occur.*

C. Authority to release pheasants for introduction or transplantation, 87-5-714:

(1) The following wildlife species may be introduced or transplanted by the department based upon scientific investigation and upon approval of the commission:

- (a) gray (Hungarian) partridge (*Perdix perdix*),
- (b) chukar partridge (*Alectoris chukar*),

- (c) ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*),
- (d) turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*),
- (e) rainbow trout (*Salmo gairdneri*),
- (f) golden trout (*Salmo aquabonita*),
- (g) brown trout (*Salmo trutta*),
- (h) brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*),
- (i) lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*),
- (j) northern pike (*Esox lucius*),
- (k) black bullhead (*Ictalurus melas*),
- (l) yellow bullhead (*Ictalurus natalis*),
- (m) largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*),
- (n) smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*),
- (o) pumpkinseed sunfish (*Lepomis gibbosus*),
- (p) bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*),
- (q) green sunfish (*Lepomis cyanellus*),
- (r) rock bass (*Ambloplites rupestris*),
- (s) black crappie (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*),
- (t) white crappie (*Pomoxis annularis*),
- (u) yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*),
- (v) walleye (*Sander vitreus*),
- (w) cisco (tulibee) (*Coregonus artedii*),
- (x) spottail shiner (*Notropis hudsonius*),
- (y) kokanee salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*),
- (z) chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*),
- (aa) lake whitefish (*Coregonus clupeaformis*),
- (bb) golden shiner (*Notemigonus crysoleucas*).

(2) The commission may by rule and subject to the provisions of **87-5-711** authorize the department to transplant or introduce species of wildlife not listed in subsection (1).

D. Authority for pheasant releases on state lands was appropriated during the 67th Montana State Legislature through the enactment of HB 637:

Section 26. Appropriation. (1) Subject to the provisions of subsection (2), for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021, in each fiscal year there is appropriated to the department of fish, wildlife, and parks for the purchase of pheasants to be released on state lands the following:

- (a) \$500,000 from the state special revenue fund established in 87-1-601; and
- (b) \$500,000 from the federal special revenue fund established in 87-1-601.

(2) If federal funds are received by the department of fish, wildlife, and parks for pheasant releases in excess of the federal special revenue appropriation provided in subsection (1), the state special revenue appropriation must be decreased by a commensurate amount and the federal special revenue appropriation must be increased

by a commensurate amount. (3) The legislature intends that the 2021 appropriation for pheasant releases be considered a part of the ongoing base for the 2023 legislative session.

3. Anticipated Annual Schedule

Pheasant releases would begin a few days prior to the youth pheasant opener, which is generally the third or fourth weekend in September. Releases may continue throughout the month of October and into November.

4. Likely locations affected by proposed action.

The most likely locations for pheasants to be released are FWP Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), but any state lands with suitable habitat will be considered, except for lands within Richland, Roosevelt, and Fergus Counties. These counties are ineligible for pheasant releases in order to serve as control sites should any assessment of releases vs non-releases counties be desired (ARM 12.9.602(f)). Additionally, pheasant releases will not occur within grizzly bear recovery zones.

5. Project size -- estimate the number of acres that could be directly affected.

Suitable pheasant habitat on state lands that occur outside of grizzly bear recovery zones and the three excluded counties mentioned above total 1,584,780 acres (Figure 1). Any of these areas may be used for pheasant releases, but the most likely areas would be those close to good roads and population centers in order to maximize access for hunters. Past research on Montana pheasant releases indicates that more than 50% of released birds travel more than one mile from the release site and have traveled up to 14 miles away (Roby, 1951). While less time between release dates and hunting would occur under this program as compared to that study (~three days vs 30-60+), this research shows that released birds may make it onto private, federal, or tribal lands in the vicinity of release sites.

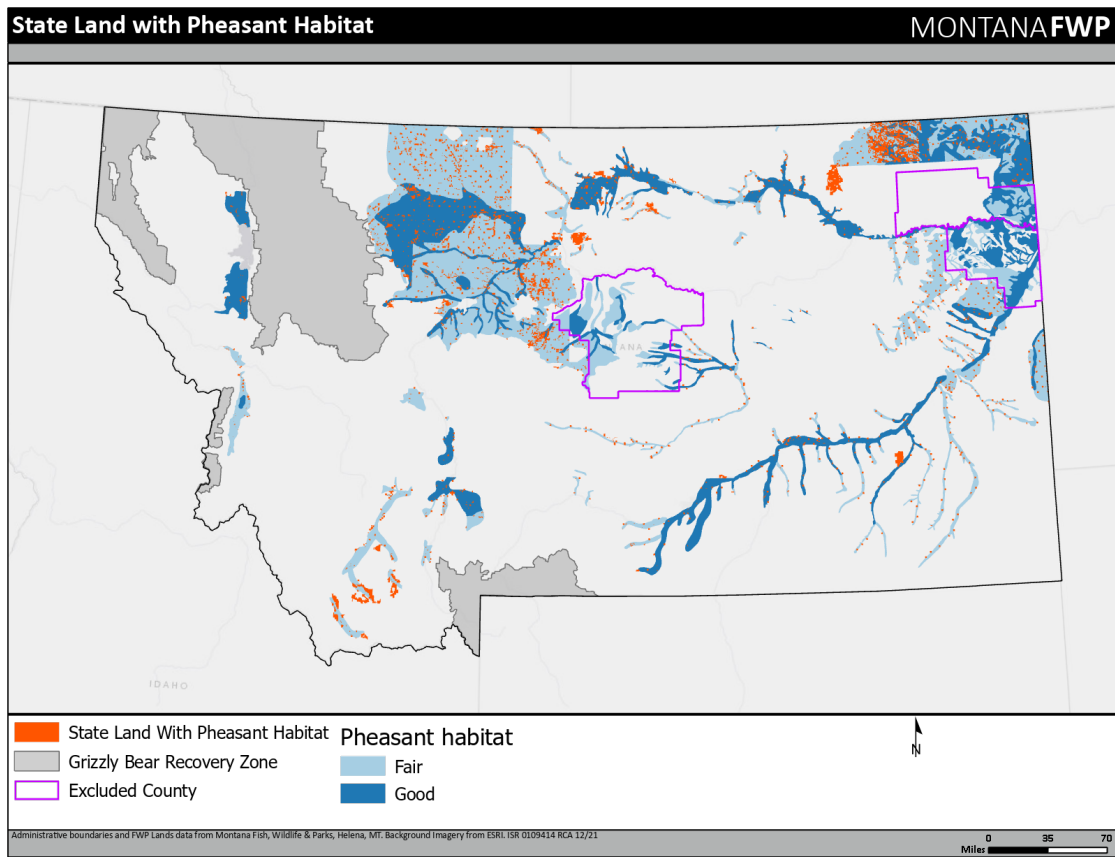


Figure 1. Suitable pheasant habitat across all Montana State Lands outside of Grizzly Bear Recovery Zones.

8. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.

(a) Permits: No permits needed

Agency Name	Permits
NA	

(b) Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount
(a) \$500,000 from the state special revenue fund established in 87-1-601; and	
(b) \$500,000 from the federal special revenue fund established in 87-1-601.	

Funds may be used to set up initial pheasant-rearing operations through Montana Correctional Enterprises at the Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge and other program costs.

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities

Pheasant releases only occurred on FWP-owned WMAs in 2021, but other state-owned lands may be added in the future.

Montana Department of Livestock (DOL) has oversight authority of all pheasant producers.

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

Montana FWP has administered a pheasant release program since 1987, whereby pen-raised pheasants are released on private lands for population augmentation and increased hunting opportunity. In March of 2021, following legislative action and funding, a new pheasant release program was established to support recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R³) efforts in Montana, which aims to engage youth in the sport of hunting, promote hunter success, and provide additional hunting opportunities for hunters of all ages.

Under this legislation, FWP will continue to develop and implement this program and release up to 50,000 pheasants annually on any suitable and eligible state-owned lands. The number of birds to be released and size of release site will vary from location to location but may total 50,000 birds annually. The number of birds per site will be evaluated according to each site, and the total number of birds released would be proportional to the size of the site, habitats available, and the potential hunter use of that that site.

In 2021, pheasant releases occurred on seven FWP WMAs, and included approximately 920 acres of small grains, 400 acres of uncultivated land, and 400 acres of riparian and wetland habitats. Suitable habitat on allowable state lands totals 1,584,780 acres (Figure 1). These lands typically contain a mix of cereal grains, idle grasses for security and nesting, wetlands, and winter cover. Habitat components vary across sites and will vary year to year.

In September 2021, the first season of this effort, FWP released 2,094 16-week-old pheasants on seven WMAs in FWP Regions 3, 4, 5, and 7, prior to the youth pheasant season opener. The table below is included to provide an example of locations and number of birds released in 2021, but these sites may or may not be used again in the future. Determinations of sites and numbers of birds will be made on an annual basis. The location of release sites and number of pheasants released annually will vary depending on several factors, including suitability of release sites and availability of pen-raised pheasants.

Region	WMA	# Pheasants
3	Canyon Ferry	600
3	Lake Helena	200

4	Beckman	84
4	Freezout Lake	510
5	Grant Marsh	200
5	Yellowstone	200
7	Isaac Homestead	300
	TOTAL	2,094

Pheasants released through the program are required to be stock from National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) certified hatcheries that have tested negative for certain poultry diseases, specifically *Salmonella pullorum*, *Salmonella typhoid*, *Salmonella enteritidis*, *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, *Mycoplasma synoviae*, *Mycoplasma meleagridis*, and Avian Influenza. Before the release, the overall condition of the birds will be assessed by department staff to assure a general healthy condition. Any visibly sick birds will be rejected for release.

Tentative plans are underway for the State Prison in Deer Lodge to begin raising pheasants for this FWP program. FWP will provide funds for start up costs for the prison to begin raising pheasants. The prison will provide pheasants only to FWP.

10. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not implement annual pheasant releases on state-owned lands and there would not be additional hunting opportunity for youth and others.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, FWP would implement annual pheasant releases of up to 50,000 birds on state-owned lands as part of agency wide R³ efforts. Pen-raised pheasants would be released annually on state-owned lands September through November to provide additional opportunity for hunters, especially youth hunters. Some releases would be scheduled to occur a few days before the youth pheasant season opener in order to maximize opportunity for youth hunters, and some releases could occur later in the months of October and November to increase hunting opportunities for hunters of all ages.

11. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

As described earlier, all source stock must be purchased from an authorized NPIP hatchery. Compliance is enforced by the Montana Department of Livestock (DOL).

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regulations? (Also see 2a.)		X				

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:		X				

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X			5b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X			5b
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X			5g
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)			X			5h
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				5i

5b. While most pen-raised pheasants succumb to hunter harvest, predation, or exposure soon after release, some may survive to mix with local wild populations. Some concerns have been raised about possible negative consequences of releasing pen-raised pheasants and other galliformes into the wild including, 1) potential disease transmission to wild pheasants, game birds, or nongame birds, 2) attraction of predators to concentrations of released pheasants, potentially impacting other wildlife (Flake et al. 2012), 3) localized increases in predator numbers due to a ready supply of easy prey in the form of released birds, which then impact other wildlife populations (Pringle et al. 2018), 4) transmission of parasites to other birds (Tomkins et al. 2000), and 5) decreased breeding success when paired with wild birds should they survive until mating season (Rands and Hayward 1987).

Recent research on the topic of disease has suggested concerns may be warranted as pen-raised pheasants have been shown to carry pathogens that may be less prevalent or non-existent in wild pheasant populations and bird species in the area and may serve as a reservoir of disease for avian and terrestrial wildlife (Dwight et al. 2021). However, despite extensive release activities, we are not aware of any documented pathogen transmission between pen-raised pheasants and wild pheasants or other wild birds in Montana. The typically short lifespan of released pheasants may reduce the degree of released birds mixing with wild birds. However, the scale of releases being planned (up to 50,000 birds annually) is much larger than any conducted in the past, so potential impacts to wild pheasants, game birds, and non-game birds may likewise increase. Conversely, the number of sites and number of acres that will be utilized for release sites will also be much higher than with previous releases, so the impacts will be dispersed and therefore may remain low. All pheasant producers providing birds to FWP are required to derive their source birds from NPIP certified hatcheries that meet testing standards and are subject to DOL oversights. Department staff will also inspect the birds prior to release to ensure only healthy-looking birds are released. Visibly sick or injured birds will be rejected for release.

5g. Concentrated human/hunter presence at pheasant release areas may result in more than normal stress to wildlife populations. However, releases will be conducted at sites relatively close to major roads that already receive recreational pressure.

5h. Pheasants may be released in areas within the documented or potential ranges of threatened or endangered species, except for grizzly bear recovery zone areas. State lands that fall within grizzly bear recovery zone areas will be excluded from any pheasant release activities. For other lands that may contain threatened or endangered species, it is unlikely that these activities would demonstrably impact those species, as releases would occur on sites that are near roads and already see steady human presence and recreational use.

5i. Ring-necked pheasants are not native to North America but were introduced as far back as 1773. Since then, they have become widespread across much of the United States, particularly in the Midwest. While populations are highest in eastern Montana, they can be found throughout the state.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		X				

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources						10e
f. Define projected maintenance costs.						

10e. The cost of this program is being covered through a \$500,000 appropriation from the state special revenue fund under 87-1-601, and \$500,000 from the federal special revenue fund established in 87-1-601.

11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings?			X			11c
d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				

11c. One of the primary purposes of this action is to increase recreational opportunities for hunters, especially youth hunters. By releasing most of the pheasants prior to the youth season opener, FWP hopes to increase the success rates for youth hunters, resulting in recruitment and retention to upland gamebird hunting. Some recreationists (both hunters and non-hunters) have expressed the desire that monies spent on this program should instead go towards funding habitat improvements for wild birds rather than on pheasant releases. However, this program and funding is separate from the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program and can only be spent on pen-raised pheasants for release on state-owned land.

Some hunters dislike pheasant release programs because they prefer to hunt wild adult birds rather than pen-raised young birds. Some hunters and hunting groups have expressed the sentiment that they do not want to 'waste' one or more of their daily three-bird limit on a hatchery bird that was not a fully feathered adult, and which did not provide fair chase. Some hunters also maintain that hunting pen-raised chicks confuses their hunting dogs and sets back their training.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		X				

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)			X			13a
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?			X			13e
f. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)			X			13e
g. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , list any federal or state permits required.		X				

13a. FWP has been conducting pheasant releases on private lands for 35 years with no known significant impacts. The scope and scale of this proposal (up to 50,000 birds annually) is new. As the number of release sites will also increase, program managers assert that negative impacts to wild pheasant populations, game and non-game birds, and other animal species would be dispersed and therefore of no overall impact than the previous smaller releases.

13e. FWP has been conducting pheasant releases on private lands for 35 years; some members of the public and some stakeholder groups have long voiced their opposition to this practice. Some concerns that have been commonly raised include 1) purchasing pen-raised pheasants is not a good use of funds because so many birds die shortly after release, 2) the hunting of pen-raised birds violates fair-chase ethics, 3) many hunters dislike hunting pen-raised birds as the birds are not fully feathered, smaller in size, and do not behave the same as wild birds, and 4) there are better methods to increase youth hunter recruitment. FWP has been mandated by the legislature to proceed with pheasant releases to help expand hunting opportunity and as part of agency wide R³ efforts. FWP will monitor the success and value of this effort. FWP has established an R³ work group that is developing metrics to measure the success of these efforts.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The Upland Gamebird Enhancement Program-sponsored pheasant release program has been in existence for nearly 35 years, and during that time there have been no known serious negative impacts to the human or physical environment that could be attributed to the practice. While this proposal would likely sharply increase the number of birds released each year, the number of locations of release would also increase, and the ratios of bird numbers to release locations would remain commensurate. Program managers and biologists will continue to watch for unanticipated impacts to wild pheasant populations, game and non-game birds, and other species that either prey on pheasants or are preyed upon by the same predators. Moving forward, it will also be important to evaluate the effectiveness of this effort in realizing R³ goals, and to weigh those against any negative impacts to local wildlife populations.

The intent of this proposal is to expand pheasant hunting opportunity for all ages and to encourage youth hunter participation. FWP has been mandated by the legislature to proceed with pen-raised pheasant releases to this end.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *Independent Record*, *Billings Gazette*, *Bozeman Chronicle*, *Glasgow Courier*, *Missoulian*, *Great Falls Tribune*, *Miles City Star*, and *Daily Interlake*
- One statewide press release;
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Notices of this environmental assessment will be distributed to interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days following the publication of the legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., February 28, 2022 and can be emailed to doneill@mt.gov or mailed to the address below:

Programmatic Pheasant Release EA Comments
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620

PART V. EA PREPARATION

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?**
Pheasant releases have been a long-term activity in Montana, providing expanded harvest opportunities and at a much smaller scale, potentially augmenting wild populations. Based on these factors and a current lack of documented conflicts or negative impacts, it is FWP's conclusion that pen-raised pheasant releases do not represent a significant threat to wild pheasants or other wildlife.
- 2. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:**
FWP Wildlife Division
FWP Legal Unit
FWP Director's Office

Sources

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