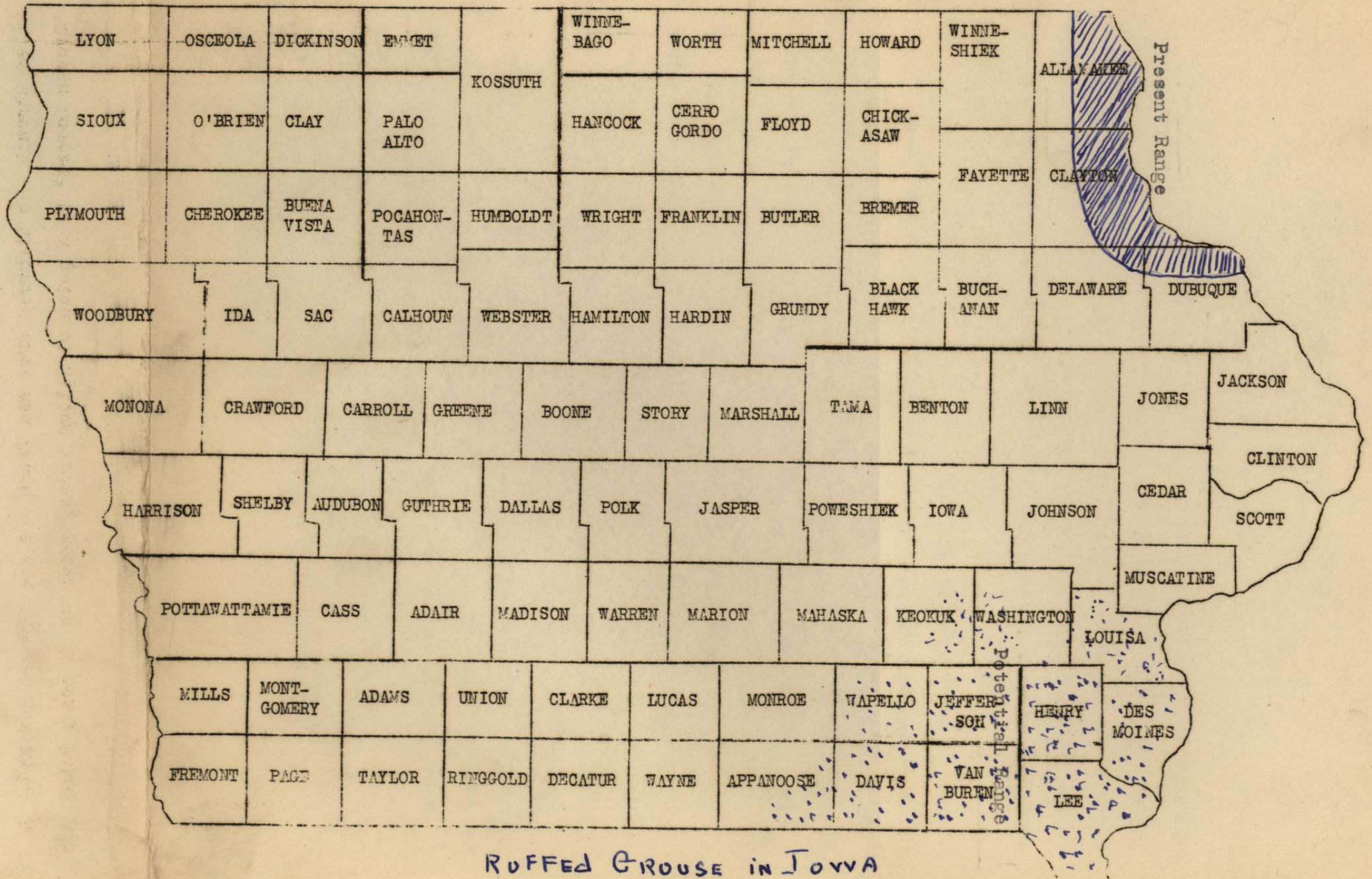


RUFFED GROUSE PROGRAM FOR IOWA

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As 95 per cent of Iowa's land is devoted to agricultural practices we are indeed fortunate to even have a remnant of the former Ruffed Grouse population left. If a program be not too expensive and complicated it is the duty of Iowa to perpetuate this grand game bird and even perhaps have a shootable surplus if the program is sound economically and biologically.

At present (1935) the heaviest Ruffed Grouse population is found in Allamakee, Clayton, Delaware, and Dubuque counties (see map 1.) I estimate that there are about one thousand birds in that area. Undoubtedly a few scattered individual pairs are found in the southeastern counties. However, many of these reports may not be reliable. Personally I have never seen Ruffed Grouse in southern Iowa.

Anderson (1907) states that at that time the Ruffed Grouse had become a rare bird in Iowa. The rough, timbered area in northeast Iowa became subject to grazing and other agricultural practices. However, the topography of that country has more or less been a barrier to agricultural activities. Therefore, we still find Ruffed Grouse in that area. However, even there the birds have just merely hung on.

The question immediately arises, "What can we do to perpetuate and increase this stock of grouse?" Undoubtedly we can not pin the cause of decline on any one point. From all indications, however, there are one or two very important and outstanding reasons for a low Grouse population. On a recent trip in northeastern Iowa I walked three miles through the timbered area and found one one "Grouse covert". A "Grouse covert" is a patch of fallen trees, grown up to heavy brush and

vines. A covert may range in size from one quarter of an acre to several acres in size. Upon approaching this covert eight Grouse were flushed. From conversations held with natives in the area practically all existing coverts in the wooded land maintained a few Grouse. Therefore, the very apparent lack of brushy undergrowths suggest one reason for few Grouse.

Leopold (Game Survey of Northern Iowa, 1932) attributes the destruction of underbrush to grazing. I sincerely appreciate the damage done by grazing and I think this may be one reason for the absence of cover. On the other hand I believe that promiscuous burning is the one bit reason for the destruction of important game flora. In going over the area one becomes impressed with the absence of drumming logs, low growing plants, and vines. In the course of three years it is safe to say that practically every acre of that area is burned over. Burning does a great amount of damage that is not apparent to the casual observer. The destruction of standing timber by fires is only a minor damage. A fire may sweep through a forest and only damage the flora of the forest floor. With the burning of the leaf mold, shrubs, vines, and decaying limbs the necessary requirements for the forest flora are greatly reduced. With this damage done the soil does not conserve moisture to the extent of soil covered with leaf mold. Therefore, we do not have a condition favorable for the production of desirable timber under plants either from a moisture or humus standpoint. (see photos showing absence of low cover)

Food is not a limiting factor in the area. Hundreds of tons of acorns are produced annually. We find quaking aspen, large-toothed aspen, and balsam poplar in sufficient numbers to furnish a great amount of bud feeding throughout the winter. These tree foods at the

present constitute the bulk of Grouse food in that area. There are forty or fifty minor food plants found in that area that supplement the more stable foods.

Taking it for granted (and I believe rightfully so) that we have plenty of food the reason for our Grouse shortage is due to absence of cover. Arriving at this conclusion our duty in the conservation and propagation of Grouse lies in the restoration of cover.

There are several methods that might be used to build up coverts that will provide Grouse habitats. I would be in favor of interesting the sporting groups in the light of nine town in that area. If each group would go out in July three or four days and lop over trees in patches of one-quarter or one-eighth of an acre systematically, say one such plot every 100 acres, I feel a great deal of cover would be constructed. The following year these areas would grow up to red oak sprouts and shrubery and an ideal covert will have been made. In some areas trees would have to be felled for drumming logs. In some cases fencing may be done around the covers. This could be financed either by the Iowa Fish and Game Commission or by the sportsmens' groups. Such a program could be carried out through the three deputy wardens in that area with the cooperation and instruction of one of the Department's Game Technicians. I believe that any of the above recommendations could be carried out with little or no interference from the farmers in that area.

The above program would have to be backed by an anti-fire program, This could be done by newspaper articles in that area on the damage done by promiscuous burning. All roads and public places should be posted with anti-fire campaign signs such as used by forestry division in other states.

If the above program was carried out as specified I have no doubt at all as to a noticeable increase in Ruffed Grouse within very few years. Assuming that the area built up a shootable surplus would the surplus and seed stock be shot off to a point where our work would be wasted? Due to the rugged topography of the land the tin-horn sport or meat hunter would be kept out. On the other hand the real sport who would be willing to put forth much physical effort for a speeding target through the trees would have restored to him one of North America's grandest shooting sports. No, I do not think the birds would be shot out. The number of Grouse hunters was always small and they were almost invariably in the same category as the quail hunter, perhaps rating even higher.

There may be several other reasons why we should undertake a Ruffed Grouse program as quickly as we can. What assurance do we have that we will have a seed stock left five years from now. Our opportunities may have passed before that time arrives.

At this time plans are under way for a National Forest in southern Iowa of approximately seven hundred thousand acres. If the proper amount of game management is injected into their program we may again have shootable grouse in southern Iowa. Where will we get the Grouse for such an area? Why not develop our remaining Grouse territory and use the surplus for expansion such as this National Forest. We could hardly expect to obtain Grouse from other states. The Ruffed Grouse is too precious to other states to permit any to be shipped to Iowa for stocking purposes. It will also be advisable to get birds on the southern extremity of their range for stocking because the northern strain is undoubtedly x different in certain inherited characteristics. Birds from northeastern Iowa may establish themselves in southern Iowa where birds from Northern Minnesota would be utter failures. This type

of reaction has been known to occur in other species.

In concluding, I wish to state that I believe that we can increase Grouse to a shootable population in 300 square miles in northeastern Iowa. Through such an effort we may be able to have Grouse in southern Iowa. Therefore, I recommend a Grouse restoration program as soon as the Department is able financially.